

RAYMOND CHANEL DEW born at Wanganui on May 9th 1913, the fifth child of George Abraham & Elizabeth Louise Dew (nee Cooper).

Primary education at Waitanguru, sole-teacher school. Two years secondary education at Paeroa District High School 1927-28. Worked on home farm with occasional outside jobs during the 1930's depression. Went to Massey College, Palmerston North to gain diploma in Herd Testing in 1933. Employed by New Zealand Herd Testing Association at Hamilton for four years, to work in the Waikato district mostly around Huntly, West Rangiriri area.

WORLD WAR 11 1939 – 45 Volunteered for overseas Army service in 1940. Went into Trentham Camp, October 1940. Left to go overseas on December 20th 1940 on the "Dominion Monarch" troop ship (two troop ships escorted by H.M.S. Achilles). Two days spent in Sydney Christmas 1940. Joined Australian convoy, including HMAS Sydney, and escorts (including the "Queen Mary"). Called at Fremantle, Western Australia, also Colombo, Ceylon. Set sail then for Egypt. Travelled through the Suez Canal and disembarked at Port Said. By train to Maadi to the N.Z. military training camp. After a few weeks training in the desert, Helwan camp, posted to the 4th R.M.T. transport unit (visited the famous pyramids etc. when on leave in Cairo).

Troops embarked at Alexandria for Greece in March 1941. Landed at Pyreus (the port of Athens). 4th R.M.T.'s job to move troops and supplies, as required, to and from front line. Troops retreating, ahead of the Germans, from Northern Greece to Athens. To be evacuated by the Royal Navy on "Kingston" and taken across to Crete night of April 25th 1941. Landed at Suda Bay, Crete. Terrible mix-up in Crete. Lived out in Olive groves for weeks. Finally, 4th R.M.T. personnel gathered together as a Unit. No transport so became Infantry composite foot-sloggers. German parachutists landed 20th May 1941 – all along the island. Troops lost Maleme aerodrome to the Germans. Maleme aerodrome was the key to holding Crete. The enemy gradually gained possession of the Island – pushing British, Australian and New Zealand troops to the fishing village of Sparkia, where the Royal Navy evacuated many thousands of soldiers.

The island of Crete capitulated on 1st June 1941 and those left behind became Prisoners of War – I was one of them. We were marched back across the island to Chania by the Germans, to a POW camp in the grounds of the 5th General Hospital (British). From there between June and August we were taken on a cargo vessel (manned by Italians and Germans to Salonika, Northern Greece. In October travelled by cattle trucks and train through Yugoslavia, Austria, Czechoslovakia to Lansdorf, Silesia, Germany. Journey took 8 days but only given food rations for 4 days. Put into Camp Stalag 8B. After a few weeks, in late November, was sent out on a working party to Goglin. Travelled 30 minutes by train from Goglin to Opelan East, working 6.00am to 6.00pm laying new railroad lines. Food issued by Germans – black bread, soup, potatoes and cabbage, supplemented by life-saving Red Cross parcels. Clothing also supplied by Red Cross from British army supplies – greatcoat, uniform, socks, boots etc. Also allowed two personal parcels from next-of-kin per year. Germans supplied little. Many prisoners-of-war would not have survived without the Red Cross supplies which came in through Switzerland and Sweden. Later we were used as labourers to build barracks for railway at Opelan West – over the Oder River, which in winter was frozen over.

*now
Poland*

In August/September working party was moved to Czechoslovakia to work at a sugar-beet factory. Sugar extracted. Then back on railway construction for another few months. 1942 – 1943 worked at Gliewich in winter of 1943 clearing snow from railway lines. Middle of 1944 drafted into groups of twenty P.O.W.s to work in coal mines in the Hindenburg area. This method resulted in friends who had been in the working parties together being split up. As we wished to stay in groups who had been together for some years we swapped with others who wanted to stay together too. On arrival at the coal mines our records did not tally with personnel. The Germans, not very pleased, decided to leave men as were – and took about a week to sort out the mix-up, by getting records corresponding to the correct groups. Dirty, dangerous work in coal mine. Three shifts worked. Wore overalls in mines – these supplied by the Germans. Food and accomodation reasonable here with Red Cross parcels. I worked here seven months.

An escape tunnel was dug from our barracks which came out under a railway line close by. By the time it was completed the weather was fairly cold so only two were game to go out – one Aussie and one Scotsman. They were out two days and then were caught and returned to the compound with one week in the cooler. Slim Climesa, the Aussie, made a “still” so we made a pure alcohol from raisins and prunes. We were silly enough to drink it neat with the result that everyone ended up stoned after a party in the Doctor’s rooms. I was found outside by the afternoon shift workers about midnight and put to bed.

Our one ambition was to get away from the mine work so we got the camp Doctor, who was a young English chap, to send us (about 6 of us) to the German Doctor at Hindenburg Hospital, who had the final say as to whether we were fit or unfit for the work. I was the only one who passed as fit. Aussie Slim who was passed unfit with chest trouble offered to go again in my name with piles and was again passed unfit. Six of us were then sent back to Stalag 8B where we again, after a week or so, had to be examined by the German Doctor to see if we were fit for other work. I knew the Doctor would query my complaint so through the interpreter I said the piles only troubled me when working underground in the mine. Doctor seemed to have doubts about this, however I was passed fit for other work.

Back in Stalag 8B I met a Canadian Air Force chap who was keen to get out on a working party to make an escape. My name came up on a working party which seemed to suit him and his French Canadian mate (who spoke French). So we changed identity and uniforms (a fairly good fit) and I became Flight Sargeant Delmar James Mooney who was shot down over the North Sea, age 25, married, from Congress, Saskatchewan, Canada, number I’ve forgotten. I shifted into his barracks – 17A Airforce Compound. He shifted into the barracks I was in in the Working Compound. The next day my name was taken off the working party list of names. Del then made contact with an English chap who was on the list. In the meantime the party had been shifted to the barracks next door which had a barbed wire fence between them and the working compound. After dark they got through the fence and changed places and names. So the English chap, Jim, became Ray Dew. Del became Jim. The next day Jim came and told me the story and I suggested we swap places so as not to complicate things more, which we did. He shifted in the Barrack 17A (Airforce), uniform and all, and I went back to his place in the working compound. The next day he returned to say he had changed his mind and was going to

give himself up the German authorities. I suggested he give the escapees a few more days to have time to make an escape. He would not agree to this so we changed places and uniforms – he was now in my name again. As there was no photo of me on my file he was photographed as me and few days later was in a party transferred to Tieskien, which had now become 8B Stalag and Lamsdorf old 8B now was Stalag 344. After a week or so he informed the Germans of the swapover in names so I heard later. I was never contacted by the Germans – I guess it was too much for them to work out. Del Mooney and his mate escaped from the working party and, disguised as French men working in Germany, they headed by train for Switzerland. On a check of identities close to the border they were found out and returned to Stalag 344 to do their punishment of a month in the camp gaol. Del then returned to the compound and Hut 17A – slept in a bunk next to mine – both as Del Mooney. We then swapped uniforms again. I was never discovered although they did a big check once against their records and photos but I managed to give them the slip by asking to go to the toilet.

Tieskien?

After living there several months, on **20 January 1945**, we were told to pack up as the camp was to be evacuated as the Russians were advancing through Poland – artillery guns could be heard. It was late afternoon by the time we left Camp and marched for several hours and finished up in a farmyard barn – cold and hungry. Early next morning we were on the road again, cold, miserable. We had taken some Red Cross food with us which we rationed to make it last for as long as possible. I was with Maurice Mayne, a London airforce chap, Flight Sargeant. We were covering a distance of 15 to 20 kms a day. Spending each night in a farmer's barn or hayloft or any large building available en route. A German guard would go ahead by bicycle to arrange a suitable place to stay the night.

After about twelve days we arrived at Gorkitz Camp 8A. We were crowded into some empty barracks, slept on the floor – hardly room to lie down. After three days we were on the road again, plus the P.O.W.'s from 8A camp. Must have been seven or eight thousand men by now – British POWs, plus Russians in another group behind us. The rations given us were not sufficient to survive on and we were hungry all the time. When we saw anything we could eat on the farms where we stayed – potatoes or turnips, we stole them if we got the opportunity. Every few days we would possibly get a soup or spuds from a farm or Military Camp.

We crossed the Elbe River at Meissen on the Autobahn main highway bridge. At the same time Dresden was being bombed by the American Airforce Super Fortresses – a great sight. After several more days on the road we were divided into two groups. Airforce in one, mostly army in the other – which I was in. We finished up just out of Erfurt in a large hay barn. By this time my fingers and feet were frozen and almost black. I had lost all feeling in them and was feeling a very sick chap. These days it would be called hypothermia. There was a British Medical Officer with us who I was able to see and who tried to get several of the worst cases into Erfurt Hospital. We were taken by horse and cart to Erfurt Hospital but there was no space available so we were taken to a Red Cross barrack run by French orderlies near the railway station. After two or three nights there, we were bombed by RAF Mosquito bombers – which landed a bomb fairly close and the blast blew out one end of the barracks – no-one was injured. Next morning two of us were taken on a hand trolley to the railway station at Erfurt and taken by a

German guard to Obermsafelt and a POW hospital in that area. We were met there by English orderlies with a hand cart. We had just got a short distance from the station when American planes came and bombed and strafed the station areas.

The orderlies, after removing all hair, gave me a nice hot shower and it was certainly a pleasure to feel clean again after about two months in the same clothes. I was given pyjamas and taken to a barracks to await a bed in the hospital – one became available after a few days. What a relief to have a decent bed and food – mostly from Red Cross parcels. The circulation gradually returned to my feet with a lot of pain – a strange feeling, probably nerves in the feet coming back to life. After about two weeks, on **1 April 1945**, we heard the Americans were close and could hear gunfire. A white sheet with POW printed on it was hung on the roof of the hospital. The soldiers of Pattons 3rd Army arrived.

I was released after 3 years 10 months as POW – **1 June 1941 to 1 April 1945**. We were taken out on trucks, the ones who couldn't walk, to a village where they told the Germans to shift out of their homes and we stayed there for a few nights until it was safe to get to Frankfurt. In Frankfurt we were put in an American Field Hospital and were there a few days before being flown to an American Hospital in England on 13th April – cannot remember the location. After a few days we went by train to White Lodge Hospital in Newmarket. Was the first POW to arrive there. My weight was just under 7 stone so was put on a special diet and very well cared for by hospital staff. The War ended in Europe on **8 May 1945** – celebrated in hospital.

After a few weeks all New Zealanders were collected and taken by ambulance to NZ Hospital at Haine, near Margate. Then another shift to East Grimstead (McIndoes) Plastic Surgery Hospital. After a small operation, it was decided that I should have the further operations done back in New Zealand at Burwood Hospital, Christchurch. Taken back to Haine Hospital to await a ship back to New Zealand – the "Dominion Monarch" was the transport, the same ship I went overseas on in 1941, now a troop ship with cabins all removed, now bunks in tiers of two and three.

I arrived back in Wellington in the middle of November, then travelled by train to Hamilton, still a stretcher case. Taken to Waikato Hospital for a couple of weeks. Got on my feet, borrowed a pair of shoes from my sister Mollie's husband, Russ Lafferty, as I had no footwear. Stayed with Mollie for a few days then went on to my parents home in Otorohanga for a few weeks before being sent to Burwood.

Was in Burwood for just over a year – had about nine operations to cover the affected areas on both feet. Had surgical shoes made at Christchurch Hospital before being discharged from the Army on **31 December 1946** on a disability pension after six years 111 days service in the army.

Doctor Manchester, the plastic surgeon, had done a great job. He suggested I should find a job where I was not on my feet too much so I settled for office work.

RAYMOND DEW