



James Phillip O'Brien diaries

Accession number M 618

Date 1939-1988

Author / Creator

O'Brien, James Phillip Edward, 1920-2004

Abstract Photocopied diaries kept by Corporal James Phillip O'Brien during the Second World War.

Scope and content Autobiography and unpublished manuscript titled 'The great survivors and peace 1891-1990' which also includes photocopies of family photographs; rejection letters from publishers; letters of support from friends and union officials; O'Brien's grandparents' marriage certificate and his father's death notice.

Description 7 diaries; 1 autobiography

Administrative / Biographical history In February 1943 the Battalion was recalled to Australia, where they received jungle training in northern Queensland before embarking for Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea. After landing north west of Lae they fought their way ashore near Finschhafen against Japanese forces and took part in the Huon Peninsula campaign. O'Brien later served in Morotai, Borneo and Mindano Island before returning to Australia at the end of the war. In July 1946 Phil O'Brien married Joyce Edna Blumel.

Access restrictions Unrestricted access.

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Preferred citation

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Series 1: Autobiography (1991)

Series number 1

Series title Autobiography

Date 1991

Scope and content

Autobiography and unpublished manuscript titled 'The great survivors and peace 1891-1990' which also includes photocopies of family photographs; rejection letters from publishers; letters of support from friends and union officials; O'Brien's grandparents' marriage certificate and his father's death notice. 1. Introduction, reasons, opinions and advice, pages 1-22

2. 1895-1920, Life, war & peace, pages 23-30

3. 1920-1939, School sports & work, pages 31-58

4. At War Oct 1939-Oct 1945, pages 59-127

5. Civy Street-Post War & War memories & the Waterfront, pages 128-202

6. Anti War & World Peace Movement, pages 203-243

7. Travel & Intro the 1990's. Pages 244-287

Author / Creator

O'Brien, James Phillip Edward, 1920-2004

Description

Description 1 manuscript

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Series 2: Diaries (1939-1945)

Series number 2

Series title Diaries

Date 1939-1945

Scope and content

Photocopies of diaries maintained by Corporal 'Phil' O'Brien, during the Second World War. Daily entries record training, military routines, leave activities and movements. Some diaries include copied black and white photographs. O'Brien enlisted in October 1939 age 19 at Kelvin Grove barracks in Brisbane, and trained at Redbank, Queensland, and Puckapunyal, outside Seymour, Victoria. Having been assigned to 6th Petrol Supply Company he left Australia aboard SS *Strathaird* in April 1940 and arrived in Egypt in May, here O'Brien took part in many campaigns including those in Bardia, Palestine, Tobruk, Bengassi, Greece, Crete, Syria and Libya. At his own request O'Brien was transferred to the 2/15th Infantry Battalion in October 1941 and participated in the First and Second Battles of El Alamein, his role as a truck driver found him often under fire from shelling or enemy aircraft. In February 1943 the Battalion was recalled to Australia, where they received jungle training in northern Queensland before embarking for Milne Bay in Papua New Guinea. After landing north west of Lae they fought their way ashore near Finschafen against Japanese forces. Later O'Brien also took part in the Huon Peninsula campaign on the northern coast, and operations in Morotai, Borneo and Mindano Island before returning to Australia at the end of the war.

Author / Creator

O'Brien, James Phillip Edward, 1920-2004

Description

Description 7 diaries (photocopies)

System of arrangement Chronological

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Access

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Other guides Transcripts available

Other

Location of originals Originals held at the Australian War Memorial, Accession no: PR91/132

Items in this series:

War diary (1939)

Unit ID M618/2

Date 1939

Scope and content

QX4247 Private James O'Brien [his name is various cited as Phillip or James]

2nd A.G.F. Camp, Redbank, (Qld.)

This diary commences on Sunday 3 September 1939 and includes a handwritten personal history by the author including childhood, education, sports participation, holidays and working life. It also includes a brief summary of the author's war service. The entries include his last days with friends before travelling by train to Redbank where he was assigned to No. 4 Depot Company, 2nd A.G.F. Camp, together with mates W. Irwin, D. Fraser, G. Newman, D. White, H. Holpin, K. Gillespie, P.O'Connell, to No.12 tent. For three months they were drilled and trained in the ways of the army, issued their uniforms and kit before being selected for specialist units. O'Brien was drafted to A Section 6th Petrol Supply camp, Puckapunyal, near Seymour, and was later granted leave to Brisbane for the Christmas break.

Author / Creator

O'Brien, James Phillip Edward, 1920-2004

Description

Description 1 diary

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War diary (1940)

Unit ID M618/3

Date 1940

Scope and content

QX4247 Private James O'Brien

Puckapunyal Camp, Victoria

This diary commences on 1 January 1940 while O'Brien was on leave in Brisbane. After returning to Puckapunyal, O'Brien was trained as a driver and infantry man and departed for service overseas in April from Port Melbourne aboard the *Strathaird*, calling into ports at Fremantle, and Colombo before arriving at Kantara in the Suez Canal in May 1940.

Barbara Camp, Palestine

The unit was located at Barbara Camp supply depot in Palestine, where they maintained vehicles and supplies of fuel which were delivered to operational units in the Gaza region. Their deliveries often took place under fire from enemy forces and aircraft, camping out overnight and making running repairs to their vehicles enroute.

Author / Creator

O'Brien, James Phillip Edward, 1920-2004

Description

Description 1 diary

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War diary (1941)

Unit ID M618/4

Date 1941

Scope and content

QX4247 Private James O'Brien [his name is various cited as Phillip or James]

Barbara Camp, Palestine

This diary commences on 1 January 1941 while O'Brien was serving with the 6th Petrol Supply Company in Palestine, where he describes their journeys to individual Petrol Points (P.P.) which took them outside of Tobruk in January. The company was later based at Tobra, Mersa Matruh, and I-Kingi-Maryuet before embarking for Greece aboard the SS '*Pennland*' in April. There they were initially based at Glyfada south of Athens, Larassa [La Rassa], and to the north at Levardia where they came under large scale air raids.

Crete, May 1941

The troops were evacuated from Greece from the port of Megara at night aboard the cruiser '*Coventry*' and landed on the island of Crete, where he remained for three weeks. They returned to Palestine on 15 May via the '*Lossiebank*' amid an air-raid after which their vessel developed engine trouble and had to be escorted by several Greek naval destroyers, to Port Said.

Hill 69, Gaza

On 31 October 1941 O'Brien was transferred at his request, to 2/15th Infantry Battalion, then stationed at Hill 69 near Gaza under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Robert William George Ogle (1904-1981). They remained in the Middle East for the rest of the year, undertaking training, route marches and lectures. *O'Brien noted on 8 December the news that Japan had attacked America and that Britain and Japan were now at war.* The diary also includes a poem by an unknown soldier titled "*The Isle of Doom*" which describes an Australian soldier's experiences on the island of Crete in May 1941. It begins "Here I sit on the isle of Crete, bludging on my blistered feet ..."

Author / Creator

O'Brien, James Phillip Edward, 1920-2004

Description

Description 1 diary

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War diary (1942)

Unit ID M618/5

Date 1942

Scope and content

QX4247 Private James O'Brien

Syria, Egypt, Palestine

This diary commences on 1 January 1942 with O'Brien now serving with the 2/15th Infantry Battalion in Palestine. Their operations took them to Haifa, Sidon, Beirut, Tripoli, Idlib and Aleppo, encountering very cold weather, with heavy rain, wind and snow. *In February O'Brien noted the fall of Singapore to the Japanese forces.* The battalion was much occupied in June and July and took part in the First and Second Battles of El Alamein. O'Brien's role as a supply / truck driver often found him under fire from shelling or enemy aircraft. He spent much of December including Christmas in the 6th Australian General Hospital at Gaza recovering from jaundice and was finally discharged to his unit on New Years Eve.

Author / Creator

O'Brien, James Phillip Edward, 1920-2004

Description

Description 1 diary

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War diary (1943)

Unit ID M618/6

Date 1943

Scope and content

QX4247 Private James O'Brien

Egypt

This diary commences on 1 January 1943 where O'Brien has inserted a list of Campaigns of the 2nd AIF in the Middle East, with numbers of killed, wounded, prisoners of war, and missing. In late January O'Brien and his unit travelled by train to a transit camp near the Suez Canal which was the first stage of their return to Australia. From Port Tewfik they boarded HMT Aquitania which sailed with a large convoy of the 2nd AIF divisions withdrawn from the Middle East.

North Queenslannd

O'Brien arrived in Brisbane on leave 1 March 1943 then reported to camp at Kalinga before taking the train north and finally encamping at Kairi, on the Atherton Tablelands. He was included in a newly established battalion and assigned to "A" Company 9 Transport Platoon and spent three months training in mountainous, jungle terrain, before moving off aboard the 'Van Heutz' where they were deployed to Milne Bay 4 August 1943.

New Guinea: Lae, Huon Peninsula, Finschhafen

O'Brien's entries detail the battalion's movements as it took part in an amphibious landing at Lae under heavy Japanese fire; the landing at Port Huon; and the capture of Finschhafen where they served alongside the 2/17th Battalion. Their patrols took them to the Bumi River,

up steep mountain tracks, to Langmack Bay, Sadlebach (Sattelberg) and Mape River. O'Brien spent his 23rd birthday close to and inside enemy lines, and was later wounded by a grenade but remained with his platoon. O'Brien and his battalion spent much of November and December 1943 in front line positions near the old German mission of Sattelburg and Nongora village, they then advanced to Hubika, Wondokai, Blucher Point and Nunzen village where they dug in overlooking a village. The diary ends with a poem titled "*Ali Baba & His Twenty Thousand Thieves*" written by Sergeant Joseph McAllister QX 2001

Author / Creator

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War diary (1944)

Unit ID M618/7

Date 1944

Scope and content

QX4247 Private James O'Brien

Finschafen, Raveshoe, North Queensland

This diary begins on 1 January 1944 with "we can see Japs evacuating along tracks on coast & our arty (artillery) get among them". O'Brien wrote of the 2/15th's movements along high mountain ridges, advancing along the coast in the Buri River area, and withdrawing to Finschhafen where they were rested. The battalion left New Guinea aboard the '*Klipfontien*' on

2 March arriving in Brisbane 8 days later where they were granted three weeks leave. In May he returned to camp at Ravenshoe in North Queensland where the battalion was rebuilt in readiness for the next phase of the war, with much individual instruction and fitness training.

Author / Creator

O'Brien, James Phillip Edward, 1920-2004

Description

Description 1 diary

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War diary (1945)

Unit ID M618/8

Date 1945

Scope and content

QX4247 Corporal James O'Brien

North Queensland, Moratai, northern Borneo

The entries in this diary which begin 1 January 1945 show O'Brien, now a Corporal, involved in much individual training and company exercises until late April when the battalion was again readied for deployment overseas. He arrived at Moratai via the *Charles Lummis* on 9 May from where his platoon was to secure Muara Island, before moving on to northern Borneo, advancing to Pandan village on the Limbang River where they remained until August 1945. *O'Brien noted the news of the bombing of Hiroshima, and later Nagasaki, followed by the surrender of Japan.* He also receives orders for his return to Australia for discharge per the Dutch ship '*Swartenhondt*' via Moratai, Finschhafen and Sydney arriving home in Brisbane 6

September 1945.

Author / Creator

O'Brien, James Phillip Edward, 1920-2004

Description

Description 1 diary

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