

LEST WE FORGET - In memory of

Grey Alexander Read

179652V, Imperial Light Horse Kimberly Regiment SA Forces

Died age 23

On 26 July 1944 - Italy

Son of John Grey Read and Grace Mable Read

The Dunes, Keurbooms River

RIP Florence Commonwealth War Cemetery



My Uncle and namesake Grey Alexander Read, son of John Grey Read, a descendant of one of the very first Read families to settle in the Cape back in the early 1800's eventually making Keurbooms / Plett their chosen home.

He was born on my grandfather's farm, "River Prospect" up in the Orange Free State, now lying under the Gariiep Dam (better known as the Hendrik Verwoerd Dam) where as a young man my Grandfather had gone to farm hoping to make his fortune farming and a faint hope of finding diamonds in the Orange River. He arrived on the farm as a strong adventurous man, little did he know the farm adjacent was Summer Hill, a farm owned by William Watkin Alexander who had four eligible daughters! He met and eventually married Grace Mable Alexander and soon enough Grey Alexander Read was born on the farm to Grace his wife. (28th December 1921)

WESLEYAN METHODIST CHURCH OF SOUTH AFRICA.

CERTIFICATE OF BAPTISM.

DATE OF BAPTISM.	CHILD'S NAME: SON OR DAUGHTER.	PARENTS' NAMES.		RESIDENCE.	DATE OF BIRTH.	NAME OF THE OFFICIATING MINISTER.
		CHRISTIAN.	SURNAME.			
18 th October 1923 No. 399	Grey Alexander son of	John G. Grace	Read	Donkerfontein	28 th December 1921	F. J. J. J.

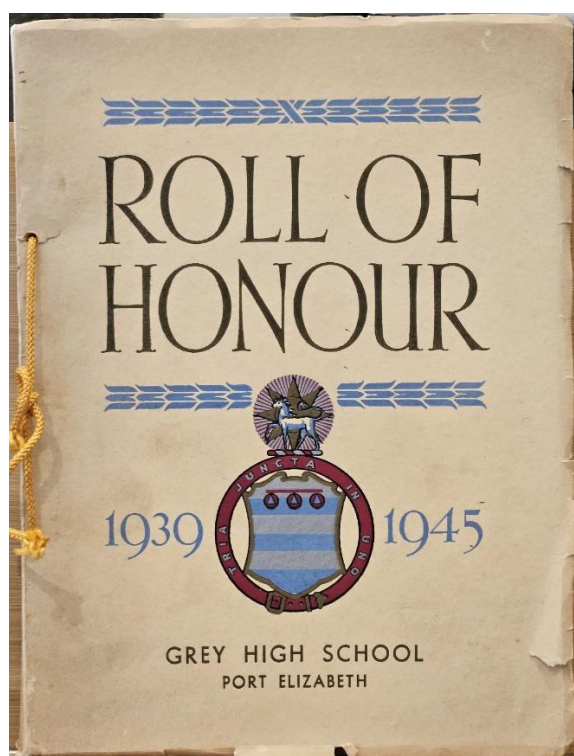
I hereby certify that the above is a true copy of an entry in the Register of Baptisms of the Wesleyan Methodist

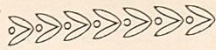
Church Donkerfontein, in the District of Donkerfontein

Dated 18th October 1923.

F. J. J. J.
Wesleyan Methodist Minister.

Farming in the Free State was hard enough to start with but for a decade due to weather and other international factors, crop, wool, meat, in fact all produce prices dropped in value (below half price) making farming a risky business and banks in general ceased all loans to the struggling farmers, resulting in many farms going bankrupt. It was because of this that Grace was forced to move to Port Elizabeth and run, then own her own boarding establishment while they tried to make ends meet. The boarding house was at 41 Western Road Port Elizabeth, I remember my mom showing it to me, top of a very steep hill, and looking down at the harbour and seeing the Campanile. The Port Elizabeth Campanile was designed by local architect WJ McWilliams of Jones and McWilliams and erected in 1923 to commemorate the centenary of the landing of the British Settlers in 1820. As a result Grey Alexander Read's youth and schooling was spent between the two places. He attended school Grey's High School in Port Elizabeth between the years 1935 and 1939.





GREY ALEXANDER READ

Grey Read was at the School from 1935 until he matriculated in 1939. He took a keen interest in school life, particularly in Rugby Football.

After a short spell of employment with Messrs. Mackie Dunn & Co., he joined the staff of Barclay's Bank in Johannesburg and enlisted at the beginning of 1941. He was posted to the S.A.T.C., and proceeded North, where he served with the 4th Armoured Car Regiment, a unit which fought with the "Desert Rats." He had a short period in the Union in 1943, and then went North again with the I.L.H./Kimberley Regiment. He was killed in action near Florence, while serving with this unit, on the 26th July, 1944.



No sooner had he finished school he worked for a short time at the firm Messrs Mackie Dunn (a bonded customs warehouse) then left the area to work at Barclays Bank in Johannesburg from where, at the start of WW2 he enlisted in 1941 with the Kimberley Light Horse regiment.

From a military point of view that regiment originally was a horse regiment back in the day, then as time went on and warfare changed due to rapid technology advancement it became the new era "Tank Division". He ended up in the Kimberly Regiment because his birthplace fell into the enlistment area for Kimberly.

During World War II, the Imperial Light Horse (ILH) and the Kimberley Regiment, forming a combined unit, played a significant role in the Italian Campaign with the 6th South African Armoured Division. They fought in several battles, Chiusi a notoriously hard fought battle, the the liberation of Mercatale, and were the first Allied troops to enter and liberate Florence. Specifically, the ILH/KimR patrol reached the Ponte Vecchio, the only intact bridge over the Arno, left standing by the Germans, before other Allied forces arrived.

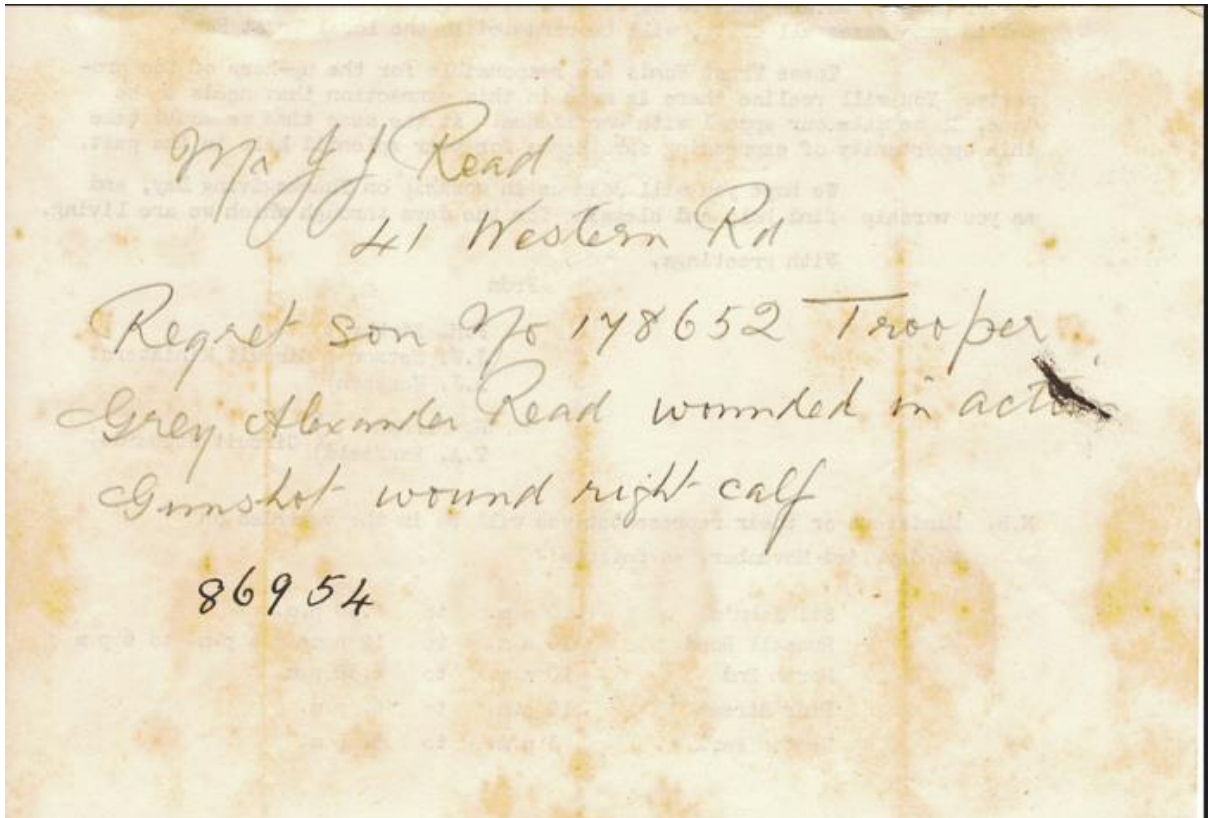
Grey's service record is one he would have been proud of! He enlisted in 1941 not long after Chamberlain announced over the radio to all commonwealth countries that Britain was at war with Germany and like many young patriotic men of the time could not wait to get going and do his bit.

These brave young men took what was known as "The Red Oath" declaring their free willing and voluntary nature South Africans felt in going to war against Nazi Germany, Fascist Italy and eventually Imperial Japan. The success of this call for volunteerism is

staggering – in the end a total of 342,792 South Africans volunteered to participate in World War 2.

These men included some 211,000 white, 77,000 black and 46,000 coloured and Indian servicemen. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission has records of 11,023 known South Africans who died during World War II . Many more were killed in action but are not buried in the commonwealth graves.

Grey fought with his regiment throughout North Africa including both El Alamein battles as did my father Ellis Smith. Grey was later shot in the leg and spent a stint in an American War Hospital in Egypt to recuperate.



Following this he was offered discharge but decided to take what was known as the “General Service Oath”. The original ‘red’ oath specified service anywhere in “Africa” and was called the ‘Africa Service Oath’ (ASO), it was changed to the ‘General Service Oath’ (GSO) once the Axis Forces in North Africa were defeated so that volunteers could be used in the European theatre and the word “Africa” was changed to “Anywhere”. Those who did not want to fight in Europe and who had only taken the ‘Africa Oath’ were returned to the Union.



The 'Africa Service Medal' was awarded to all who served in South African Forces during the Second World War, the 'red tab' in this medal's ribbon is symbolic of the "The Red Oath" taken.



The 6th Armoured Division "Springboks"

Grey was part of the South African 6th Armoured Division which was formed in May 1943, as South Africa's contribution to the invasion forces of Italy. They took part in training exercises in Egypt before heading to the Italian front. A little known point of interest is that already back then Rugby Union was strong in South Africa, New Zealand and Australia and many of the strapping young men enlisted either played Rugby, some even being in the then Springbok Rugby team or would end up playing for them.

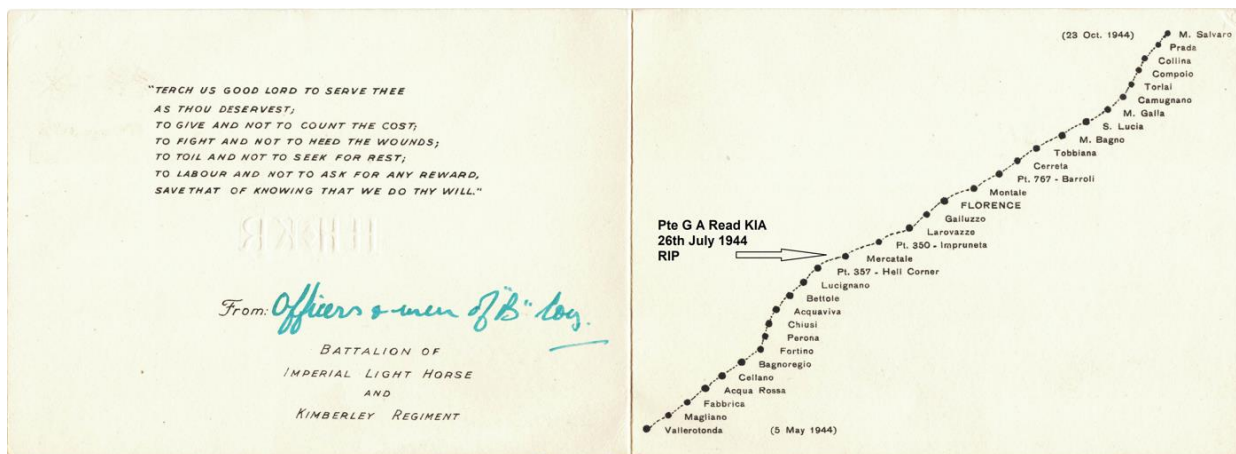
In identifying a need for stronger and more formal sports representation, especially rugby – within the 6th Armoured Division they formed South Africa's default "Springbok"

rugby side to take on the planned 'internationals' with 'select' sides from British, Australian and New Zealand military formations now in Italy including the 2nd New Zealand Division. Although I have no proof Grey was a part of the team, I do know he was a rugby player of note while attending Grey's High School in Port Elizabeth.



Action shot from the SA 6th Division vs New Zealand Base on 1st Jan 1944.

The ILH Armoured Divisions were hugely instrumental in driving the German's back up through Italy, the German's then defence line went through the Hilltop Town of Chiusi making it extremely difficult to attack. This record of the ILH progress shows the various major battles they were involved in during 1944.



The Germans were entrenched in the Hilltop Town of Chiusi which made it very difficult to attack and liberate. Chiusi was the strong point of the Trasimeno Line which had to be broken. Summarising, there was a three-fold attack, armoured forces approaching along the railhead (of which my uncle Grey was a part) and two companies including the "A" Company, attacking from either side, one clambering up the olive tree terraces to the East and the other pressing up the road leading to Chiusi. They were hampered by enemy small arms fire and extremely heavy artillery, mortar and anti-tank fire thickened by Nebelwerfers, which prevented them crossing the low ground south and south-east of Chiusi along the railhead.

Example of a Nebelwerfers.



I have been honoured to visit the town of Chiusi and my Uncle's grave in the commonwealth grave site at Florence in Italy.



On my visit to the town not long ago, I drove in to the limited space town centre, perhaps better described as a village, perched on top of a hill and parked slightly away as there was literally no parking in the town square. It was midday and everyone was having a siesta but walking the short distance from the car towards the town square we met an old Italian man. I asked him where the town theatre was and he immediately said he would show me. Probably realising I was South African he asked, why are you interested in the theatre, is it to do with the South African soldiers that were trapped in the theatre and massacred by the Germans? I was taken by complete surprise that an old man so long after the event would remember especially as this was nearly 70 odd years since the war.

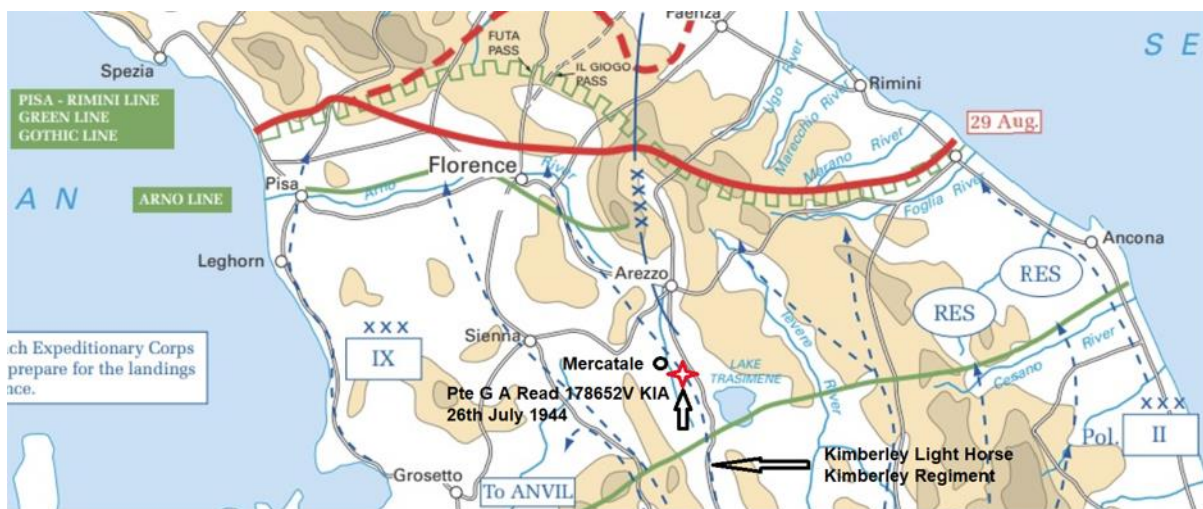
He led us to the building then said he would like to show us a stone wall memorial in the town square that the town folk had built in honour of the South African soldiers that died liberating their town. (especially those trapped in the theatre). On the way he pointed out a monument in the square, dedicated to the town folk, mostly men and boy's,

executed by the Germans, as was their custom, as they evacuated and retreated after defeat by our allied forces.

The whole visit was for me an extremely emotional event!

After liberating the town of Chiusi they continued North, fighting numerous significant battles including Acquaviva, Battole, Lucignano, Pt. 357 Hell Corner, Mercatale. It was just after a quiet day, camped on the bank of the Arno river, where Grey wrote home that he had just had his first wash, a refreshing swim in clean water for many weeks” (07/07/1944)

This is a map showing the ILH progress towards Florence and the spot where on the 26th July 1944 my Uncle Grey was killed.

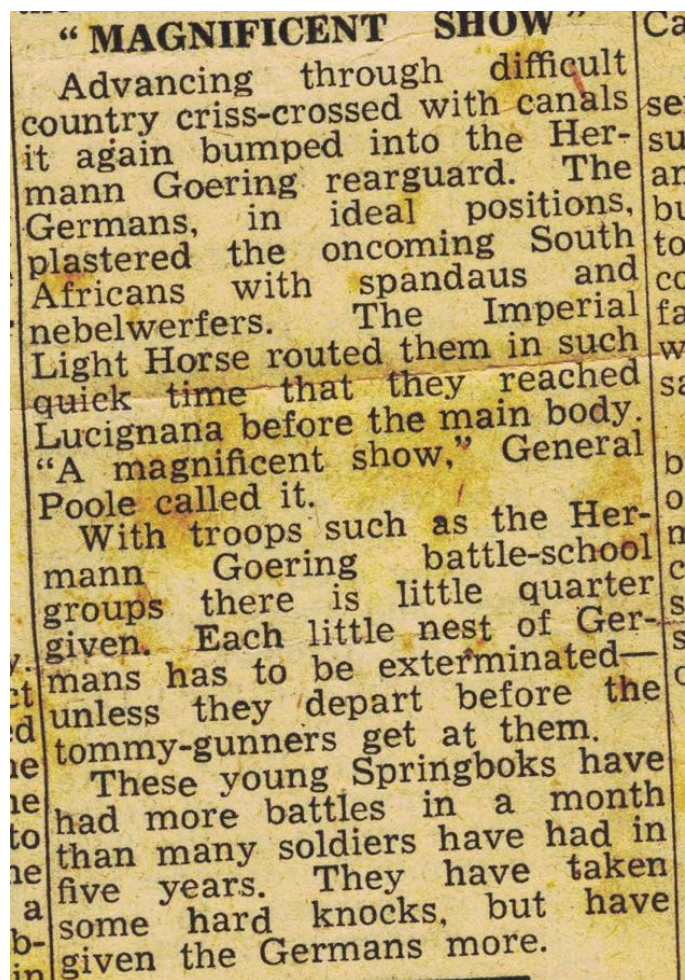


Sadly soon after that my Uncle Pvt G A Read 178652V KIA on the 26th July 1944 in Italy near Mercatale was killed. My mother reported she had met a fellow soldier after the war who was there and said that unfortunately Grey's tank took a direct hit from a German shell and the entire crew was killed. His war diary reveals that on the 26/07/1944 06h15 in the morning, "their tanks caused enemy tanks to withdraw and the position was consolidated. No 2 p1 B Coy now had only its P1 Comd and 7 OR's left. C Coy during the attack came under heavy SPANDAU fire (In World War II, the term "Spandau gun" was a nickname used by Allied soldiers for both the MG 34 and MG 42 German general-purpose machine guns.) and were pinned down temporarily "runner" communications became necessary due to limited range with 38 sets but with closer support by the tanks being ordered opposition was wiped out and the objective fully consolidated. Mortar and shell fire was particularly heavy. A Coy were also heavily shelled during the day and suffered quite a number of casualties. Towards evening the shelling died down. No 2 sec 2 Pi and A Coy were attacked by a party of the enemy from the right flank, these were driven off and later 7 enemy dead were found in the area. The success of this attack drove the German's North of the river Greve and enabled an easy advance to that river. This was one of the most important and successful operations. A Coy sent out an Officer and two secs on a patrol to Mercatale, they went through the village and returned without incident. During the day TAC was heavily shelled and mortared suffering fairly heavy casualties. The casualties suffered were: Including G A Read my uncle according to reports killed when a shell dropped inside their tank. The following

sadly lost their lives that day.

30	ALLISON, R J	Private	75794V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	25	III. F. 6.
131	BESTER, M J	Private	193163V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	23	III. E. 1.
215	BURGER, A P	Private	230823V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	Unknown	III. G. 17.
242	CARMICHAEL, D	Lieutenant	SR/598597V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	Unknown	III. E. 15.
25	GILL, R	Private	20410V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	22	III. E. 18.
44	GOUWS, J A	Lieutenant	60942V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	Unknown	III. G. 18.
69	GREER, S H	Lance Corporal	41101V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	Unknown	III. F. 2.
✓ 21	JOHNSON, J. McK., J M	Private	20453V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	24	XI. F. 4.
27	MARAIS, F M J	Private	20488V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	23	III. F. 5.
210	ODENDAAL, W P	Private	241950V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	22	III. E. 14.
92	READ, G A	Private	178652V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	23	III. F. 3.
120	STOPFORTH, G L	Private	20581V	Imperial Light Horse/Kimberley Regiment, S.A.Forces	26/07/1944	Unknown	III. E. 17.

It seems those brave lads of the ILH endured more in the month of the approach to Florence than some other soldiers saw in the whole war!



When we remember our war dead, we seldom think about the hidden consequences on those left behind and the often traumatic affect receiving that telegram has on the families. John Read, my Grandfather, living on his farm at Keurbooms River received this dreaded telegram:

T. 27. POST OFFICE TELEGRAPHS.—POSKANTOOR-TELEGRAAFDIENS.

§ G. P. S. 7253—1913.4—180,000-200. S.

Traffic Serial No. Verkeers volgnommer.	Class. Klas.	Handed in at— Roete—	Ingelewer te— Roete—	Words. Woorde.	Date. Datum.	Time of Handing in. Tyd van inlewing.	Office Stamp.
	1st	Portoria		36	3	4.7	
				33			
Received Ontvang.	At Om 9.20	TO AAN	Mrs Mrs J.G. Read.			At Om	
	From Van Kuy		Keurbooms			To	
	By Deur Evan		Dier Kuy.			By Deur	

W.R.C	79/4937/K	Department	of
Defence		deply	regrets
informs	you	that	your son
17965-2	V. J. Private	Grey	Alexander
Road	was	killed	in action
26 July			
		Dewasec	

Doubtful words may be repeated. No Repetition Fee will be collected if an error is disclosed. This form should accompany any inquiry.
Twyfelagtige woorde kan herhaal word. As 'n fout aan die lig gebring word, sal geen koste vir die herhaling gevorder word nie. Hierdie vorm moet alle navras vergesel.

The lives of close family and friends were shattered. My Grandfather living alone on his farm at Keurbooms, my Gran Grace Maple Read, separated now living in Port Elizabeth and Grey's loving sister, my mother Margaret Smith (nie Read) soon to marry my father, Ellis Smith living with her mother in Port Elizabeth at their boarding establishment known as Glamis.

The dramatic effect Grey's untimely death had on each had deep-rooted ramifications. My Grandfather suffered terrible depression and loss of motivation, perhaps the shock even having something to do with the onset of his prostrate cancer that ultimately killed him. Luckily, he had a close friend Attie, the editor of the Uitenhage newspaper of the time that wrote to him in consolation saying:

"I felt very heartsore after saying goodbye to you at the station this afternoon because I felt you would be so very alone on your mournful journey and I wish I could have travelled along with you.....Now that you are together I want to tell you how all of us have been quiet and tearful because our thoughts have been with you and we are sharing as best we can your sorrow. If it can be any comfort I hope you will be thankful that he, Grey, because of his goodness and high principles is in a happier place and is resting in perfect peace. What an agony for you all it would have been if he had been sent back maimed and helpless."

The Times

OF UITENHAGE AND EASTERN
PROVINCE DISTRICTS
John S. Hultzer P.O. Box 46
Proprietor Phone 1
Associated with Hultzers, Swellendam
UITENHAGE, C.P.

5. Aug. 1944

My dear John,
I felt very heartsore after saying good by to you on the station this afternoon, because I felt you would be so very alone on your journey, and I wished I could have travelled along with you. When this reaches you you will have your two good and loving women folk with you to help you to bear your loss and you in your turn will be a comfort to them. Now that you are together I want to tell you how all of us here have been quiet and tearful because our thoughts have been with you and we are sharing as best we can your sorrow. If it can be any comfort I hope you will be thankful that he because of his goodness and his high principles is in a happier place and is resting in perfect peace. What an agony for you all it would have been if he had been sent back to you maimed and helpless. I think in such a case, as we believe this life to be a preparation for a far more wonderful and beautiful experience to be called suddenly is surely happier than to linger here longing for

My Gran Grace Maple Read did not fare much better, she grieved visibly for the rest of her life finally passing a few years later on 27 June 1947, clearly as a result of a broken heart.

In conclusion the words from the Order Of Service at the Unveiling and Dedication of the Memorial Plaque at the Drill Hall in Kimberley ring in my ears:

God of our Fathers, Known of Old
Lord of our far-flung battle line
Beneath whose awful hand we hold
Dominion over palm and pine-
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet
Lest we forget – Lest we forget!

Hymn – God of Our Fathers
Tune – Melita

Note: 120 other brave young lads made the ultimate sacrifice from his school during WW2 RIP



Finally my Grandfathers words on the Gravestone

Grey Boy,
God Bless and Keep you
Until we Meet Again!

