

Abraham Myer Goldberg (1914-2014)

Doctor and farmer



Family background

Abraham Myer Goldberg was born in Kimberley in 1914. He was the first of 5 children of the patriarch Solomon and his wife Deborah Goldberg (a sixth child the firstborn had died in infancy). Solomon, a refugee from the Pale of Russia, was a stern but loving man who instilled a firm work ethic and the belief of exceptionalism in his children. Deborah was a gentle woman who adored her children and who won the hearts of all who met her. **Abe** was the older brother **Issie Goldberg** and both were brothers-in-law of **Ivor Haas** who married his sister Gertie Goldberg. See their stories here [Goldberg, Solomon, Deborah & Family](#).

Abe went to a catholic school, Christian Brothers College (CBC) Kimberley, where hard work and stern morals were inculcated into the young student, reinforcing the same lessons drummed into him at home. He excelled at school and won the second prize for general proficiency across all CBC schools in the British Empire in standard 9, the year before matric (which would be the equivalent of the Junior year in the US). For this he received a leather-bound set of the collected essays of Macaulay which he has kept to this day – and which is now being read by the fourth generation of his progeny! He also excelled at cricket but was putrid at piano. To the end of his life he remained disinterested in music.

After matriculation in 1932 he went on to medical school at University of Cape Town, graduating in 1939, the year after Groote Schuur Hospital was founded. He spent the next six months at that Hospital and then transferred to the Pretoria General Hospital where he completed his internship. He was appointed a medical officer in Basutoland (now Botswana) and spent a year based in Maseru. He tells of hair-raising rides on horseback

into the Basuto mountains to investigate smallpox and other epidemics. (The 'Basuto Ponies' were famous for their ability to navigate the difficult paths up and down the mountains of that Kingdom).

World War II

It was from Basotoland, that in about January of 1941 he volunteered for the South African Army and proceeded to Johannesburg for his basic training with the **Rand Light Infantry**, destined to become part of the **South African Second Division** under General, and then **Field Marshal Montgomery**.



While in training in Johannesburg he dated a young girl, Bussie Busansky. On learning in May of 1941 that he was shortly to be shipped out to North Africa he asked her to marry him. The wedding took place on 8 June 1941 through the indulgence of Abe's commanding officer. He had placed Abe at the head of the African troops who were to be shipped out a month after the Regiment. This afforded the young couple the time not only for the marriage but for a brief honeymoon on the Vaal dam. Abe tells the story that the religious wedding ceremony took place a day before the civil licence would be issued for some bureaucratic reason and so Rivka, Bussie's mother insisted the couple spend the night apart. Oy!

During the very **dangerous journey north to the war front**, with several thousand desperately seasick African troops on board and zig-zagging through the submarine infested waters of the Red Sea, one of the VIPs on board became seriously ill with an infected appendix. The senior officer on board the ship did not feel qualified to operate nor did the doctors on board a hospital ship accompanying the convoy. It fell to the newly qualified young Abe to perform the emergency surgery in a makeshift Operating Room. He had to train an assistant to administer the anaesthetic. This was the age of ether and urge as he may, he could not persuade the young man to drip sufficient ether on to the mask. So, he was forced to operate with the patient insufficiently sedated and with his muscles extremely tense. The captain had offered to slow the vessel

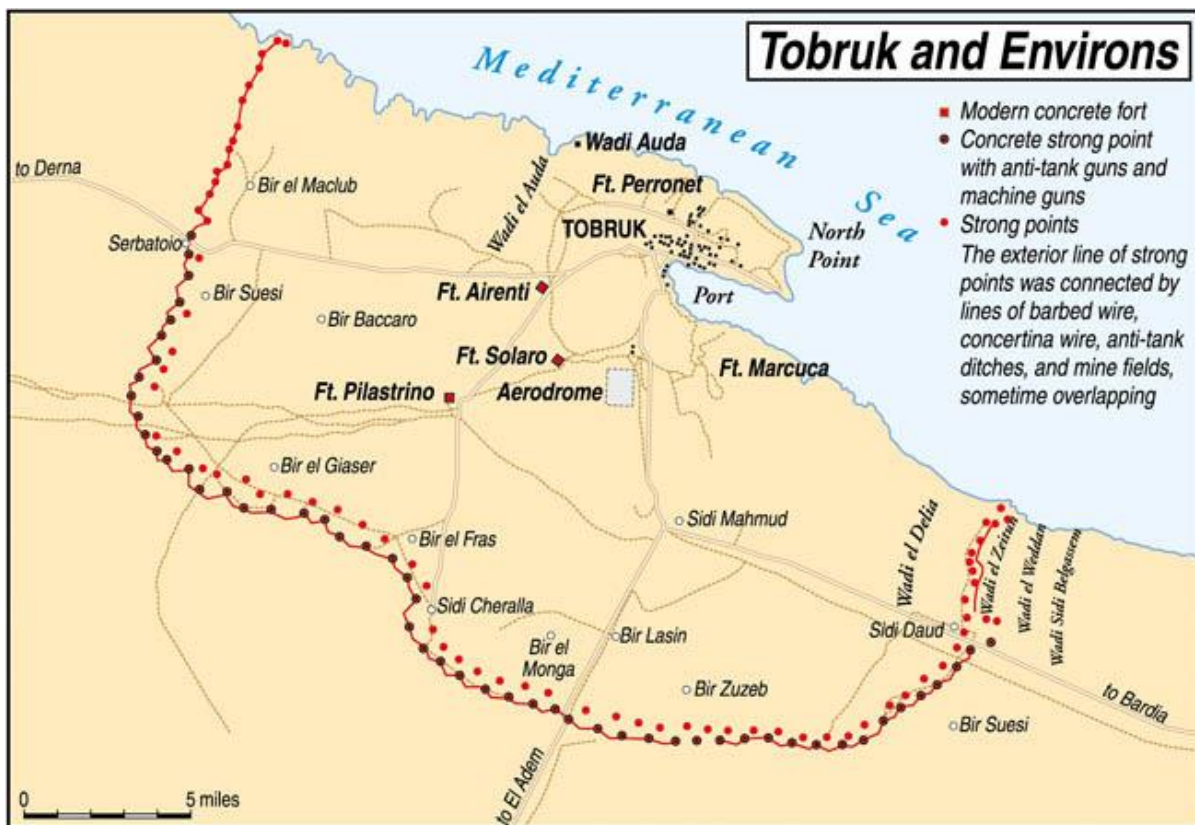
down and cease the zig-zagging during the procedure but with the knowledge that U-boats had been sighted in the area, Abe demurred and proceeded to operate with the vessel in helter-skelter mode. The patient survived and all ended well. No medals however were awarded!

Tobruk, Libya

Abe served as a **Captain** and a **Regimental Medical Officer** of the **Rand Light Infantry** (RLI) in North Africa and participated in the difficult evacuation of the forces from Gazala, Libya. He tells of the miles and miles of a single file of vehicles retreating in stop-go fashion down the Gazala escarpment in darkness, potentially at the mercy of artillery and aircraft. This was the cream of the Allies' forces and, were they to have been discovered and intercepted, Egypt would have surely fallen to the Germans, with untold consequences for the war.

Abe remembers that the ambulance in which his unit was travelling inexplicably and suddenly turned its lights on, causing huge consternation. He stopped the vehicle, jumped

out
and



smashed the headlights with an axe!

The retreat wound its way towards the **“fortress” of Tobruk** but on arrival there, his group was met by a South African officer who, in a flat panic, pointed to a distant onrushing column of German armour and ordered them to turn and race north. This was what saved

them – by minutes – from being caught by the Germans in the Tobruk “fortress” – and joining the other 10,000 South Africans who were captured. Many of those imprisoned never made it back and others who did, suffered terribly after the war from many different physical and mental maladies.

El Alamein, Egypt

Abe was later at the front in the crucial battle of **El Alamein, Egypt** where the **Rand Light Infantry** was with the Allied forces that drove back the German and Italian divisions. This was the turning point of the war in North Africa and the West. He ascribes the deafness that he suffered later in life to the terrible noise of the artillery barrage that preceded the battle. The main heavy guns were directly behind his position. He described the noise of those guns with great wonder even 70 years later.

Up to the end of his life, Abe Goldberg had vivid dreams of the horror of those days at El Alamein. He was required to accompany the forward troops as they penetrated the German lines. ‘The troops’ he explained ‘could crawl on their bellies. We had to drive forward in this huge, exposed, unarmoured ambulance, an absolute plum target!’



The South Africans bore the full brunt of the early drive through the German lines until they were relieved after the first 4 days. Their losses were horrendous, and Abe was faced with triaging the worst of them and sending them to the rear.

Back in South Africa

Abe Goldberg came back from war a changed person: much more serious and while not anti-social, somewhat aloof from society. He remained this way until late into his sixties when he began to relax and enter the social milieu with a greater sense of ease. He also became almost ascetic and never touched alcohol from the time of his return from North Africa. His diet was spare: he and Bussie ate an essentially fat free diet from their mid-forties when medical science began to understand the impact on heart disease of fat and after Bussie developed heart disease. In the nineteen fifties when she became ill this disease was practically a death sentence. However their diet and his care kept her in excellent health and an active lifestyle for a further fifty years.

After his discharge from the army he commenced private medical practice in a tiny Transvaal town, Naboomspruit and then for many years in Brakpan, South Africa, a small town about 25 miles from Johannesburg. He most certainly could have practised in Johannesburg earning a good income: his social reticence seemed to inure him to these quiet waters when the practice of medicine was no guarantor of even a middle-class income: the average consult yielded the princely sum of 10 shillings and sixpence or roughly one SA Rand – in those days approximately one US Dollar. Less than a pittance.

During his many years in practice he constantly dabbled in many pursuits: hobbies such as still and cine photography, caravan touring (in the caravan he built himself of course), scuba diving, flying, ocean going yachting. This kept his busy mind occupied.

Farming

He also pursued a side-career in farming, at one-point farming on several thousand acres scattered across three farms across the Transvaal. The farming ended in financial disaster when, after a (borrowed) fortune was sunk into irrigating the tomato crop a huge thunderstorm wiped out the entire crop just before harvest. This was one of a progression of several failed business ventures conducted in parallel to this medical practice that included doll making, insurance broking, home building, pool building and many others. In each of these ventures Bussie proved the doer while Abe was the 'brains' of the operation.

Eventually, in the 1970s – after a brief stint in Swaziland – the couple moved to Vanderbijl Park where he took up a position as a medical officer with Iscor, the South African Iron & Steel manufacturer. On a small farm on the road from Vanderbijl Park to the Vaal Dam that the couple purchased, they started a rabbit farm. The rabbits proved a further loss as South Africans were not given to a Rabbit diet! In due course however the rabbits were replaced with chickens and with the opening of a farm stall on the road which conveniently

enjoyed a busy resort destination traffic, the couple found their metier and finally prospered!

After retirement from general practice at the age of 62 and the successful sale of the chicken farm, Abe and Bussie spent some years travelling and visiting with their son Trevor in the USA. They returned to settle in Cape Town, South Africa where he decided to study Anaesthesiology at Groot Schuur Hospital, Cape Town and obtained his diploma in 1978. He practised in that branch of medicine at several hospitals.

Emigration to the USA

Abe and Bussie emigrated to the USA to join **youngest son Trevor** in Charlotte, North Carolina. Shortly after that his **middle son Larry** and family and later this **eldest son Norman** and family also joined them in Charlotte, reconstituting the family unit, almost in its entirety.

Bussie and Abe led an extremely active life in Charlotte where they attracted a wide circle of friends. Abe became a social animal after years of reticence and Bussie enjoyed entertaining and being entertained. In this they were aided and abetted by the broad and deep social connections that Trevor and wife Linda had formed in Charlotte. Bussie and Abe continued to socialise and play tennis until their late eighties when they left their beautiful condominium and entered a retirement community. They gradually slowed the pace of their activities, particularly as Bussie began to evidence the signs of Alzheimer's. Abe single-handedly treated Bussie until almost the very end. Finally at the age of 92 he surrendered his driving licence (not without a tremendous battle) and permitted his sons and daughters-in-law to help with the care of Bussie.

Upon the death of his beloved Bussie in 2007, after 66 years of marriage, he moved to the home of Larry in Cary where he was the most cheerful person in the house. He was the favourite of Larry and Jill's friends and of the great-grandchildren for whom he was known as 'Great Baba'. He was beloved of the whole neighbourhood who kept an eye on him during his daily walks. After his 96th birthday he contracted pneumonia which he was able to shake off but it was decided that he would be better served by being in an assisted care community and so he moved to the Phoenix Assisted Living Center just about a mile from Jill and Larry's home in Cary, North Carolina.

He loved the Phoenix, telling all who would listen that 'This is an excellent institution!'. He survived, at age 97, a fall resulting in a shattered hip but over time his strength slowly ebbed. On 1 July 2014 he was overjoyed to learn of the birth of Solomon Goldberg, named

after his father, and his eleventh great-grandchild. He was delighted on the day with the visit of three great-granddaughters, Nina's children and smiled broadly at their profusely offered kisses. Finally, on 5 July 2014, at the age of 99, with Jill and Larry at his bedside, he quietly fell asleep, not to awaken. He had lived a complete and full life a man.

Obituary for his father written, by Larry Goldberg USA

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