

Dad , me... and the Four Feathers

One of my childhood memories sparked and started when I bought a second-hand DVD of a film at a Carterton secondhand store. It was a film I saw when I was twelve years of age. This *The Four Feathers* was set in the Sudan and made in 1939. It's about the "great" British army doing brave things in the Middle East during the time of General Kitchener in the 19th Century. Huh... it's colonialism!!!! Big time!

My interest in the Middle East began because my father a young soldier in the British army He was based for some years in the Sudan and Egypt. He spoke of both countries with affection. As a young child I had assumed Dad was killing people every day of his life. I was not very wise. I found out as an adult that Dad never ever killed anyone. He was in the Machine Gun Corps for a while but then was transferred to the Royal Army Pay Corps and remained there for the rest of his army career.

World War Two was over. Dad was home on leave. The local cinema was showing *The Four Feathers* film, a film about the Sudan. I asked Dad if I could see it. He agreed, and we went together.

Before the film he bought me food – in the interval he bought me more food and drinks and afterwards we went for a restaurant meal. Young people remember food. I can still taste that time, the drink and the food.



What a film – thousands of Sudanese rushing over the desert on camels and horses shouting and shrieking and waving spears and swords. British soldiers firing guns. Explosions. Smoke everywhere. A white man disguised as an Arab doing brave things. I did not know what the four feathers meant. I thought American Red Indians were going to appear any moment on screen. But they never did. The four feathers were white feathers to denote cowardice.

I asked Dad if he was there when it happened? How dumb I was. He smiled at me. The film time was set in the previous century, he said. Dad was kind. He said that when I became an adult and read history, I would find out the truth. He said the film was based on a novel, but

that the scenes of Arabs on camels were real, and were staged for the film. He thought it was filmed in Egypt.

I loved the film with the long fight scenes and desert sand and rocks and the tents and the Nile river and the cataracts with dozens of sweating men pulling the boats. If you ever watch Joanna Lumley and her BBC series on her Nile journey, you see the original boat used by the British generals.

Many years later Peggy and I went to Egypt - Cairo – lived on a boat on the Nile for three nights, visited the Abu Simbel statues and flew to Khartoum in the Sudan to meet a friend working there.

We sailed on the Nile. It was a myth come true. I thought of my father and also Shakespeare wonderful couple of Marc Antony and Cleopatra. Many years later I worked in Juba – South Sudan and sailed on the Nile there too. Saw crocodiles sleeping. Went into the Sud... the swamp of the Nile. Read and hear stories about people killed a hippopotamus for food. And I had dreams about **The Four Feathers**. Wonderful.