When World War Two broke out, three theological students left their college in Auckland to the sound of bagpipes and volunteered to fight. Eddie Norman, aged 22 from Hawke’s Bay, was one of them. A natural leader, his first experience of action was at El Alamein in 1942 as a platoon commander, and during the Italian campaign he quickly rose to command 25 Battalion.

Under Eddie, the battalion was responsible for the division’s success at Cassino, almost single-handedly smashed the German defensive line south of Arezzo and led the advance across the Senio to the Sillaro River. He was awarded the Military Cross, Distinguished Service Order and American Legion of Merit.

Eddie’s regular letters home to his new wife, Margaret, described daily army life fighting in the heat of the desert and the wet winter campaign in Italy when the men were holed up in the ruins of Cassino and pursued the enemy through Tuscany to the Adriatic Coast.

Eddie returned home to Margaret and his studies for the Anglican priesthood, eventually becoming Anglican Bishop of Wellington and, in 1984, a Knight Commander of the British Empire.

Eddie Norman and 25 Battalion is told by Eddie’s daughter Elizabeth Kay using his letters and other writings, 200 images and a series of custom-made maps.