

Another byline reclaimed for the South

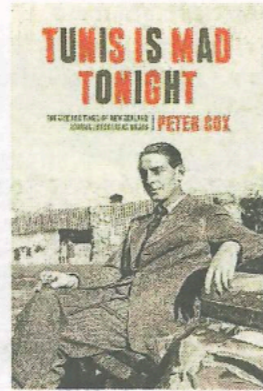
TUNIS IS MAD TONIGHT
Peter Cox
Quentin Wilson Publishing

By JIM SULLIVAN

There is an impressive list of journalists from Southland who made their mark internationally.

Geoffrey Cox, the founder of ITN's *News at Ten*, in Britain, was a product of Southland Boys' High School; and Peter Arnett, the face of CNN for 20 years, was a Riverton boy. We can now add Douglas Brass, the subject of Peter Cox's biography, to the list.

Brass was born in Invercargill and the opening chapters on his family life, days at Waitaki Boys' High School and the University of



Canterbury summarise well the experience, shared by many Southlanders, of finding life's opportunities further north.

After a stint in Bluff as a junior reporter for *The Southland Times* he worked for *The Press* and in 1934, at the age of 24, he was in Wellington as parliamentary

reporter for that paper and the *Otago Daily Times*.

Within a year he was off to *The Argus* in Melbourne.

Brass moved to *The Herald* where his boss was Keith Murdoch and the scene was set for Brass' later career as Murdoch's right-hand man in the then News Limited media empire.

But first the war. Brass joined the Australian army in 1942 but was soon appointed as a war correspondent, and it is for his outstanding and widely-published reporting from the battlefields that he became known.

The title of the book comes from his description of entering Tunis as the Germans

surrendered: "Men clung to the running boards, seized our hands and kissed our cheeks. Women were weeping and waving handkerchiefs and flags and throwing kisses. Tunis is mad tonight."

With access to hundreds of Brass' reports, Peter Cox treats us to some fine writing and takes care to include his subject's comments on his fellow countrymen.

New Zealand readers will appreciate the inclusion of judiciously selected side stories featuring soldier/writers like Dan Davin and John Mulgan, while an appendix "The Waitaki Five" (James Bertram, Ian Milner, Charles Brash, Angus Ross,

Douglas Brass) is a useful backgrounder to the milieu in which Brass spent his formative schooldays.

When the story moves to Brass' days with Murdoch, we learn much of the takeover of *The Dominion* and Brass' role in the founding of *The Sunday Times*.

Dominion news editor Alan Hitchins commented that Brass was "scintillating" — a word which "kept cropping up in his conversations and it summed up the quality he wanted in the newspapers".

Peter Cox has told Brass' story with elegance and, in rescuing his man from near oblivion, has performed a valuable service.

Jim Sullivan is a Patearoa writer