

A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: SX18000
Name: Leslie William HURST
Nickname: Les



Medals and Decorations

1939 - 45 Star

Pacific Star

Defence Medal

War Medal 1939 - 45

Australian Service Medal 1939 - 45

Rank: Sergeant

Service: Army

Enlisted: 16 Mar 1942

Discharged: 20 May 1946

Leslie was born at Balaklava on 4 Oct 1920 to William John Hurst and Lillian Martha Hurst (nee Ratchew). There were 5 children in the family of which Les was the eldest (2 boys and 3 girls). His father was a share farmer at Merriton for the Crouch family.

Les went to school at Merriton (near Crystal Brook, SA), leaving at Grade 7 to help his father with the farm work; he also worked on a number of farms in the area. He moved to Ungarra in the late 30s and worked for Rex Storey as a farm labourer: he remained in this employ until he enlisted, but it obviously was not all hard work as he also met his future bride, Estelle Mary Woolford whilst at Ungarra; Estelle was the telephonist at Ungarra and daughter of Albert and Ena Woolford of Ungarra. They announced their engagement just prior to Les leaving to enlist.

Les enlisted at Wayville (SA) on 16 Mar 1942 and was posted to the 2/2nd Machine Gun Battalion as a reinforcement. The Bn comprised mainly NSW and Qld personnel, but was reinforced by machine gunners from South Australia and Western Australia when it returned from the Middle East to Australia; it was sent to the Atherton Tablelands for jungle training. In Aug 1943 the Bn was sent to Milne Bay (PNG) to help guard the allied base; the following month it landed at Lae (PNG) to support the 9th Division. Upon landing the Bn came under attack from Japanese aircraft resulting in heavy casualties.

After the landing at Lae part of the Bn supported the 20th Brigades landing on Scarlet Beach, north of Finschhafen (PNG), which was captured on 2 Oct 1943; thereafter the rest of the Bn was brought forward to defend the area. The Bn fought in PNG for the rest of the year, providing support during the capture of Sattelberg and the advance to Sio (both PNG).

The Bn returned to Australia in early 1944 and spent the rest of the year training at Ravenshoe (Qld) on the Atherton Tableland. In Mar/Apr 45 the Bn deployed to Morotai Island to support landings on various islands in Borneo by 9th Division; the first of these took place when D Coy, in support of 20th Brigade came ashore at Tarakan Island (Borneo). The machine gunners worked closely with the Infantry who were using flame throwers to destroy Japanese positions, as one veteran later remarked “it was a nasty one to finish the war on”. Les came through unscathed, except for a broken ankle. Meanwhile the rest of the Bn landed on Brunei Bay and Labuan Island in Jun 1945.

Following the Japanese surrender the Bn was concentrated on Labuan Island. On 20 Jan 1946 the Bn returned to Australia and was disbanded in Brisbane on 26 Feb 1946.

After discharge Les returned to Ungarra and took employ with Jim Butler. Within a few months he married Estelle (26 Oct 46) and applied for a “Soldier Settler” block. In late 1949 he was allocated sections 426 and 427 at Lipson as part of the Soldier Settler Scheme; Les went to live on the block whilst the house was being built; his wife remained at Ungarra with their new born son, Rodney. When the house was completed in 1950, the family was again united. On moving to the block, Jim Butler gave Les 3 bags of wheat as seed for his first crop on the new land.

Like most farms on Eyre Peninsula, rabbits were a great problem at the time. The family persevered and remained on the farm; as the years rolled by their only child, Rodney became more involved in the operation of the farm. Unfortunately Les was diagnosed with cancer in late 1979 and died of this disease in Dec 1980.

He is buried in the Tumby Bay Cemetery.

The family then moved to WA. However, Les’s wife returned to Tumby Bay and resided at Lawrie St until very recently when she moved into Uringa Hostel.

Les was very community minded and a keen sportsman. He was the Secretary of the Lipson Show Committee, Secretary of the local Agricultural Bureau and Secretary of the Tumby Bay Flower Show; as well as a mentor in the Rural Youth Program. He excelled in cricket, having been a member of the Lipson First XI and was selected in the Lipson team of the century (as was his son). He was also an active member of the Tumby Bay Sub Branch of the RSL.



Les & Estelle, 1946