

A SOLDIER'S STORY



Service No.: 3435
Name: Leslie Sawle PLAYER
Nickname: Les



Medals and Decorations

1914 - 15 Star.
British War Medal
Victory Medal

Rank: Corporal
Service: Army
Enlisted: 30 Jun 1915
Discharged: 8 Jul 1919

Les was born at Mitcham (SA) in Nov 1895 to Sawle Player and Catherine Player (nee Memus). He was one of 9 children, 3 boys and 6 girls; One of the boys, his twin brother, died at 3 months of age. The family lived in Gumeracha (SA). His father was an Auctioneer and General Commission Agent with E Coles & Co. of Adelaide.

Les went to school at Mitcham, leaving at year 7 as was common for the time. He then took employ with the same company as his father, working as a clerk, and remained in this employ until his enlistment.

Les enlisted in Adelaide at the end of Jun 1915 at Keswick (SA) and was posted to 10th Battalion (Bn) as a reinforcement. After basic training, he embarked on 27 Oct 1915 on HMAT “*Benalla*” for Alexandria, where he was transferred to 13th Machine Gun Company, 50th Bn; he was promoted to Sergeant. After 4 months he was again on the move, this time aboard the “*Ivernia*” bound for Marseilles (France), arriving on 12 Jun 1916.

On arrival in France his unit went straight into action when their Division (5th) took over a section of front line between St Laurent Blangy and the southern edge of Vimy Ridge, near Arras. They moved south in late July to reinforce The Somme and were in action at High Wood, The Battle of Guillemont, The Battle of Flers-Courcelette, The Battle of Morval and The Battle of Le Transloy.

Les was wounded on 2 Aug 16 and transferred to 4th Casualty Clearing Station before being evacuated to 22nd General Hospital, UK. After convalescence, he returned to the front and was reposted to the 4th Machine Gun Battalion, seeing further action at Ypres. The Machine Gun Battalions suffered some of the heaviest casualties of any units during WW1.

Les had a difficult time with authority whilst in the Army, having made the rank of Sergeant on 4 different occasions; each time losing his stripes due to some misdemeanour, the most serious resulting in a Court Martial in the UK.

Les returned to Australia aboard the “*Armagh*”, arriving in Jul 1919 and took his discharge on 8th of that month. He worked in a number of locations in Adelaide, all associated with the hospitality and hotel industry.

In Mar 1926 Les married Isabel Wilcomb Read at the Prospect Baptist Church. On 24 Jun 1927 their first child was born, June Isabel, but unfortunately the little girl died one year later (18 Nov 1928) at North Adelaide. It was then that the family decided to move to Tumby Bay, arriving at Christmas 1928. Les then became the licensee of the Tumby Bay Hotel (The Red Roof), holding the licence from 16 Jan 1929 until 1 May 1949 and was a very well known figure in the town. Of course this was during the Great Depression and operating any type of business must have been extremely challenging; Les not only operated the business successfully, but was well respected in the community.

An interesting piece of memorabilia which is held in the local museum is a china cup with the inscription “Player Hotel” on it which was found at the rear of the Tumby Bay Hotel. It is referred to as “The Player Cup”.

Whilst in Tumby their second child was born, Peter Benson: he went to school at Tumby from 1936 to 1943, when he left to attend Scotch College in Adelaide.

Les was a founding member and stalwart of the RSL in Tumby Bay: he was president for 15 years from 1931 to 1946. In 1935 he re-formed the Tumby Bay Sub Branch after it moved from Lipson. He was made a life member in 1950 and returned to Tumby Bay on 14 May 1977 as guest speaker at the annual RSL dinner.

His medals are displayed in the National Trust Museum in Tumby Bay.



1914-15 Star

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Victory Medal



The Tumby Bay Hotel, back when it was still a single story building