

# William Hamilton Cooper

My maternal grandfather, William Hamilton Cooper, was born at Brushgrove, New South Wales on the 27 May 1891 the fourth child of William Hamilton Cooper, a farmer, and his wife Kate (Catherine).

William enlisted in the AIF on the 2 September 1915 at Lismore, NSW (service no. 4114). His unit embarked from Brisbane, QLD on board HMAT A73 Commonwealth on the 28 March 1916.

William's elder brother, Samuel, also enlisted in the AIF on 29 September, 1916 ( service no. 2458). He served in the 11th Lighthorse Regiment, which served in the Middle East. He returned safely to Australia and lived a long life.

William's youngest brother Joseph enlisted in the AIF for WW2 in May 1940 (service no. NX 16114), and saw service in the Middle East. He was repatriated back to Australia and discharged in 1940, long before the war ended. I assume the discharge was for medical reasons. He suffered ill health until he died in October 1941, aged 36. He was the first returned soldier from WW2 to die in the Lismore district.

All three Cooper boys fought for King and country.

William served in France and Belgium, being wounded three times: he received a gun shot wound to the scalp in November 1916, November 1917 he was gassed and in August 1918 he received a shrapnel wound to his left thigh. On each occasion Bill was sent to England for treatment and then was sent back to France to fight. Bill was in Europe for the duration of the war, being repatriated back to Australia on the 22 February 1919 and being discharged medically unfit on 3 July 1919.

Bill took a Soldiers Settlement loan and bought a farm. In 1921 he married Belle Munro (Isabella Lillian Munro), a nurse, at Maclean NSW.

Bill and Belle settled on the farm and went on to have 8 children: Keitha born 1922, Joyce 1924, Isabell (Betty) 1926, Jean (Jo) 1928, William 1930, Norma 1932, Marian 1934, Henry Kenneth (Ken) 1936.

An excerpt from their eldest daughter Keitha's memoirs :

'Before World War 1 Dad had been a cane cutter and when the war was over after a few years he went dairy farming at Kangaroo Creek on a soldier settlement property. It was very hard work for very little reward as the depression made it hard to make much of a living and then in the early 30's the drought was dreadful, years without rain, cattle died as the creek and water holes dried up. It got so bad our family went to live in Grafton in a rented house, that was in 1936 and a little later Ken was born. Dad did many jobs including chopping wood at different homes. Then he got a job at the experimental farm. It must have been difficult with 8 children to feed and school but it was a wonderful loving home ...

When we lived on the farm Jo was very sick. Rheumatic fever then osteomyelitis where the marrow leaked out of her leg, it was very painful. Jo was in Grafton hospital a lot of the time and Mum had heard that the doctors in Newcastle or Sydney would be more effective in helping Jo's condition. World War 2 had started as it was 1939. The only way such a large family could afford to make such a move was for dad to re-enlist in the army where he knew he would be stationed at Newcastle (Nobby's Beach) where many men who had been in World war 1 were. To bring their families down they rented a small apartment in a house (between Hunter and King Streets) near the car park. Each family took their turn until each found a home. We, that is, mum and all my sisters and brothers arrived by train into Newcastle around 3am April 1940. It was dark and gritty, I didn't like it at all. I didn't want to leave Grafton. After a few days we found a flat above the Greek cafe at number 1 Hunter Street, near the beach where all the trams turned into Hunter Street. Our first sight of trams.

We stayed there several months until we found a more suitable house to rent. A gun barrel house in Hopkins Street The Junction. We settled into life well, the kids went to school, Joyce to Tech (tafe) learning dressmaking and I was working at the egg board in Darby Street. I worked there for 8 years until I married. I loved Merewether beach.

Sadly the war seemed never to end so many going overseas to fight, some not coming home at all, others wounded. Dad used to come home on leave and he was now stationed at Nelson Bay - GAN GAN.

We all made great friends and even with all the shortages and rations we all enjoyed life and were happy. Jo was having good treatment and was getting better, even going to school.

The news of the war was getting better...peace was declared in Europe but still dreadful fighting in New Guinea and the Coral Sea. Many of our boys became casualties then one wonderful day...PEACE - VICTORY...

I was at work...we all went down to Hunter Street so did all the population of Newcastle.... what rejoicing...dancing in the street with people we did not know. It was wonderful to think it was all over at last. It was sad to see some of our men when they returned wounded and sick. The prisoners of war were the worst, especially from Changi Singapore. Impossible to believe they could be so thin and sick."

Mum (Betty) always said the farm property was poor quality farm land. After struggling through a long drought and the Great Depression the farm was repossessed. Bill moved his family into Grafton and worked at any job he could get ... building roads, repairing cars. Aunty Keitha said her father didn't have much education but he could turn his hand to anything. He was a hard worker all his life.

Bill re enlisted in the AIF (service no. N71013) on 27 October 1939 in order to move his family to Newcastle to get better medical treatment for his daughter Jo, who was suffering from osteomyelitis. After experiencing the horrors of the Great War, it's hard to believe Bill contemplated re enlistment, but his family came first.

He was stationed at Nobbys Camp and later at Gan Gan, Nelson Bay.

His daughter Jo eventually recovered and went on to marry and have a family.

After WW2 ended, the William Cooper family remained in Newcastle. Nana was involved with Merewether RSL, and the family too were involved in the RSL youth activities in the late 1940s.

The Coopers eventually purchased a home in New Lambton. Bill's health began to fail. My parents married in 1951 and my aunt remembers Bill being very frail at this time. I remember visiting my grandparents as a small child in the late 1950s. The Poppy Cooper I knew was an old frail bed ridden invalid. Mum (Betty) blamed his illness on him being gassed in the war.

Bill Cooper died in Concord Hospital in 1961 from bronchitis.

Belle Cooper died in Newcastle in 1965.

Both are buried at Sandgate Cemetery.

Bill and Belle left a large family, 8 children and 19 grandchildren. They had a hard life, but as Aunty Keitha remembered, they created a loving home for their family and raised their children with solid values and a strong work ethic.