

THE LITCHFIELD BROTHERS



Aubrey

Lester

Cecil

Ernest

Four brothers from New South Wales who gave service during the Great War. All the boys returned to Australia but certainly for two of them it came at a high personal cost.

The Litchfield Brothers:

Second Lieutenant Ernest Norman Litchfield – 3rd Infantry Battalion

2361 Private Cecil Roy Litchfield – 31st Infantry Battalion

Private Aubrey Daniel Litchfield – 35th Infantry Battalion

421 Private Lester Verna Litchfield – 1st Machine Gun Company

The four boys were amongst six surviving children of nine born to Ernest Daniel Litchfield (1868-1916) and his wife Sarah Ann Heil (1870-1943). They had, at times, a challenging childhood, with their mother suffering ongoing mental health issues due to the death of her first-born child at seven weeks and their father deserting the family in 1908. Much of their up-bringing was guided by the oldest surviving sibling, only sister Ethel (1891-1984).

The first to enlist was Ernest Norman Litchfield (1893-1959) on 17 August 1914, just 13 days after the declaration of war by Britain against Germany. He was promptly promoted to Sergeant and was part of the landing at Gallipoli with the 3rd Battalion on 25 April 1915. After four weeks on the peninsula Sergeant Litchfield suffered a bullet wound to the left side of the head requiring his evacuation to Malta.

Returning to Gallipoli in July, Ernest was promoted Second Lieutenant on 4 August 1915 just before the attacks at Lone Pine and The Nek. It was at Lone Pine, between 6 and 8 August that Second Lieutenant Litchfield's war came to a shuddering halt. The diary of the 3rd Battalion records on the 6th, "*..... hung on to the trenches taken against vigorous counter attacks and heavy bombing. Our casualties are unknown but very heavy.*" A similar story is detailed over the next two days with an entry on the 8th stating "*The enemy kept bombing continuously*".

Ernest was one of the many casualties, being severely wounded by a bomb blast that resulted in a compound fracture of the humerus of his right arm. Evacuated from Gallipoli, the injured arm was

amputated at the shoulder. After recuperating in the Middle East, he returned to Australia from Suez in the 'Ascanius' in October 1915.

Shortly after his return he married Elizabeth (Lizzie) Louisa Guy on 3 February 1916 at the St Pauls, Cleveland Street, Sydney. Ernest returned to his work as a railways clerk and became involved in the Limbless Soldiers Association of NSW. The couple lived at Haberfield and had three children, two boys and a girl.

Their eldest son, NX 60137 Gunner Ernest St Clair Litchfield was accidentally killed in Egypt on 5 April 1941 whilst serving with the 3rd Anti-Tank Regiment of the Royal Australian Artillery. Their daughter, Ethel Florence Litchfield also served during World War II with the Australian Army Medical Women's Service.

Tragically, Ernest Norman Litchfield took his own life at Watsons Bay in 1959. His wife, Lizzie had predeceased him in 1958.

Cecil Roy Litchfield, the second oldest brother, enlisted on 22 November 1915 just after Ernest Norman Litchfield arrived home with his horrific injury. Was it the dismay of seeing his brother so badly maimed that triggered Cecil to join-up or was it like so many – just seen as the right thing to do? Certainly, he would have known what he was getting into, or did he?

He listed his sister Ethel as his next of kin, noting his mother was at Kenmore Asylum and the whereabouts of his father unknown.

Cecil left for the war zone in March 1916 with reinforcements for the 31st Battalion. After two months in Egypt he embarked for England in June before undergoing a couple of months of training. In September 1916 he was sent to France and was pitched into the fighting on the Western Front. But like his eldest brother Ernest, it all came to a horrifying end when he was severely wounded in the left leg at Remus Wood, Belgium in October 1917.

The injuries to his lower leg were so severe that ultimately it was amputated at just above the knee. His recuperation was long and difficult, with extended stays in several hospitals in England. It wasn't until March 1919 that he returned to Australia.

He married English born, Ivy Gladys Williams in 1927 and they were to have two children. Cecil worked as a telephone mechanic and the couple lived at Marrickville. For a period, his mother Sarah lived with them, before moving to live with brother Aubrey in the 1930s. Ivy died in 1962. Cecil, ultimately, moved to live with his son at Strathfield later in life.

Cecil Roy Litchfield died on 21 September 1991 at Narrabeen at the grand age of 96.

Fully aware of the terrible injury suffered by his eldest brother Ernest, Aubrey Daniel Litchfield signed up on 3 January 1916 at West Maitland. He was just over 18 years old and had been working as a farm labourer in the Glen Oak district just north of Maitland at the time. He indicated that the whereabouts of his parents were unknown.

Assigned to the 35th Battalion, like many from the Newcastle and Hunter Valley region, Aubrey left Sydney with the 35th bound for the United Kingdom in May 1916. Arriving in early July, the battalion

spent the next four months training. Aubrey crossed to France in late November and moved into the trenches of the Western Front on 26 November, just in time for the onset of the terrible winter of 1916-17.

But his time in the line was short lived, he suffered a debilitating gunshot wound on 17 February 1917 to his left arm. He was evacuated to England suffering from a fractured arm and wrist. By July he had recovered from his injury but the damage to his left arm restricted his movement and he was deemed medically unfit for active service. In late August 1917 he was on a ship bound for Australia – his time abroad being just 18 months. Like his two older brothers, he returned bearing the physical scares of battle.

After the war Aubrey married Muriel Christina Shaw at Glebe in 1923. He established a successful grocery store at the corner of Illawarra Road and Cary Street, Marrickville which the couple operated for 39 years. His mother Sarah lived with them during the 1930s until her death in 1943. They raised two children and in the late 1940s the family moved from residing above the grocery store to just over the Cooks River at Bayview Avenue, Earlwood. In the last few years of her life, Aub's sister Ethel also came to reside at Bayview Avenue.

Married for 65 years, Aub Litchfield died at Earlwood in 1988 at the age of 91. Five years later Muriel passed away also at 91 years of age.

As preparations for the major offensives by the Allies on the Western Front in mid-1916 ramped up and the call for more men increased, young Lester Verna Litchfield decided to follow his older siblings to the battlefield. Just ten days after his seventeenth birthday he attended the recruitment centre in Addison Road, Marrickville and signed the enlistment papers. He gave his age as 18 years and 1 month.

Lester was assigned to the Machine Gun Reinforcements and after training at Glenory, New South Wales and Seymour, Victoria he embarked for England from Melbourne in late October 1916 arriving just two days before Christmas. In late April 1917 he crossed to France, just before his eighteenth birthday and was taken on strength by the 5th Machine Gun Company.

Throughout 1917 he was in and out of hospital in France with pyrexia of unknown origin (PUO). In early 1918 Lester was evacuated to England with trench fever. By June 1918 he had recovered and was based at the Machine Gun Training Depot in England.

On 23 April 1919, Private Lester Litchfield arrived back in Australia, his war over.

He married Ruby Catherine Mullard in 1922. They were to have three children with the oldest Verna Mary Litchfield serving with the RAAF in Melbourne during World War II whilst son, Kendall enlisted in April 1944 in the RAAF and served as a Leading Aircraftman. On 2 September 1942, Lester signed up for service with the 2nd AIF. He was assigned to the 103 Tank Attack Regiment attaining the rank of Warrant Officer II, serving most of his time in the Northern Territory.

In early 1945 he was transferred to Lae, New Guinea. Sadly, his wife Ruby died on 1 August 1945 whilst Lester was overseas. He returned to Australia on 7 August and was discharged on 27 October 1945. In 1951 he married Kathleen Clarice Ell. They were together for eleven years before her death.

Lester Verna Litchfield, who served his country in both world wars, passed away on 30 September 1968, aged 69.

Another brother, Ernest Raymond Litchfield who was born in 1906, the youngest surviving sibling, enlisted in the Commonwealth Military Forces in 1942 at Gresford, New South Wales during World War II.

LEST WE FORGET

