

ANZAC SPIRIT – Corporal Frederick Hurtle Little by India Little

'Nunguam Victus', Latin for 'Never Beaten', was the motto the 2/48 Battalion adopted and lived by during the Second World War (1939-1945). Beginning 77 years ago, the battle for Papua New Guinea during World War II breathed new fire into the Anzac Legend, firstly spawned at Gallipoli¹. Frederick Hurtle Little, raised in the small South Australian farming town of Keith, felt a sense of duty to his country and eagerness to follow in his father's, a World War One veteran, footsteps. However, Little was soon to find himself in the thick of one of the most treacherous tracks in the world, the Kokoda Trail. The soldiers who fought in the Papua New Guinea Campaign served and sacrificed for the defence of their country, 'not in defence of the old world, but the new world'². It is said that for Australians, the battles fought in Papua New Guinea remain to be some of the most important ever fought³. Despite Little having limited training, Little would become a part of a battalion that remains significant in Australia's history.



Figure 1: Frederick Hurtle Little, 16 years of age, service number SX23749.

Frederick Hurtle Little was born to Hurtle Clifton Little and Gladys Ethel Little (nee Welden) on January 17, 1923, in Mount Gambier South Australia. Little was the second eldest in a family of seven brothers and one sister. He grew up in the small town of Keith, SA, for the majority of his life, having moved there on his 8th birthday. The Little's moved to Keith in search for work after both Hurtle and Gladys, who previously worked in the railway barracks in Taillem Bend and Cockburn, located to

the border of South Australia, near the NSW border and Broken Hill. Little continued his schooling in Keith but once reaching Grade 6, he left school and worked on a property owned by Mr M.F Crooks, which involved mostly milking cows. Later he moved on to a large property called Wynarling as a general farm hand. He also worked as a shearing contractor throughout the district up until enlisting in the war. He met his sweetheart, Roma, at a dance prior to his enlistment; they continued to write letters to one another while Little was at war (See Figure 3). Whilst this was an opportunity to get to know one another, it also gave Little something to look forward to.



Figure 2: Frederick Little, ready for duty.

Due to lack of employment and willingness to fight for his country, Little enlisted with his eldest sibling, Ronald James Little at Puckapunyal in Victoria, July 22, 1941. Having lied about his age upon enlistment, Little declared to officers that he was 19 when he just 16 years of age (See Figure 1). The enlistment standard age

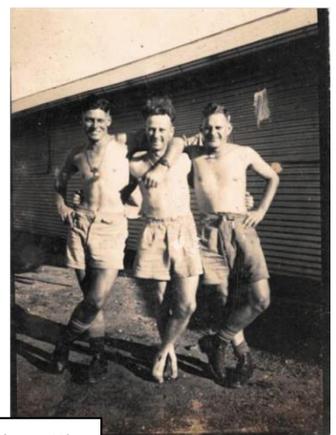


Figure 4: Frederick Little alongside mates at war.

had been lowered to 19 in 1941, and 18 in 1943, however, even with the age limit being lowered, men still not permitted to go to New Guinea⁴.

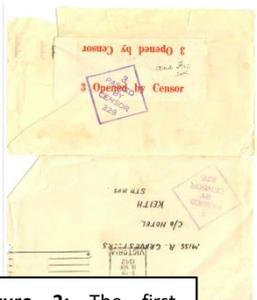
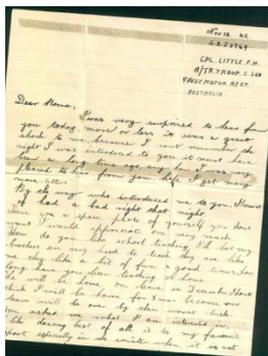


Figure 3: The first letter Frederick Little sent back to Roma along with the envelope.

¹ Dailytelegraph.com.au. (2017). *What really happened at Kokoda*. [online] Available at: <https://www.dailytelegraph.com.au/news/national/kokoda-campaign-surviving-veterans-share-their-triumphs-and-horrors-in-jungle-warfare/news-story/aded217a81eed21ba9e4733a56f4d> [Accessed 14 April 2019]

² Keating.org.au. (2019). *Honourable PJ Keating - Anzac Day - 25 April 1992*. [online] Available at: <http://www.keating.org.au/anzac-day---25-april-1992> [Accessed 14 April 2019]

³ Department of Veterans' Affairs - Australia. (2012). *Kokoda*. Canberra: Dept Vet. Affairs, p.126.

⁴ Memorial, T. (n.d.). *Enlistment standards | The Australian War Memorial*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/articles/encyclopedia/enlistment> [Accessed 16 Apr. 2019]

Despite this, Ronald put a claim into the officers to support his brother so they could go to war together⁵.

Both of the Little boys were allocated to the 3rd Light Horse Regiment to commence their training. Two years later, Little was placed in the 2/48th Infantry Battalion in the 9th Australian Division and was sent off to fight in Papua New Guinea, 1943 (See Figure 2).

In the depths of Papua New Guinea, lies an unrelenting track that is now known as the Kokoda Trail, where profound respect is held for the soldiers who sacrificed their lives in the jungle. Kokoda provided its own challenges for the soldiers without the addition of a ruthless enemy. The unpredictable jungle contained steep slopes, few tracks, and deep treacherous rivers. The jungle was thick and foggy, with rugged mountains that were often soaked by rain. The conditions were ideal for camouflaging the enemy who was often not seen until only a few metres away; soldiers had to continually be on high alert, as they attempted to advance through the steep ridges⁶. For the Anzacs, it was not just surviving the enemy, they also had to contend with the deadly wildlife, debilitating diseases such as malaria that plagued soldiers all whilst enduring the harsh, unpleasant conditions. A local Rat of Tobruk, Desmond Loxton, compared the two theatres of war and spoke about the great respect obtained for the soldiers on the Kokoda Track as a result of what they endured, "I think we had it better off than those at Kokoda... we had desert, dust and flies... those boys had to fight in the jungle. We did not have it as tough as they had it."⁷. The Australian soldiers had limited experience and little time to adapt to life in the jungle. The Japanese Soldiers who were more experienced and familiar with the conditions the jungle presented were referred to by many of the Anzacs serving at Kokoda as barbaric people who adopted torturous methods such as rape and cannibalism⁸.



Figure 5: Frederick Little, 16 years old, 3rd Light Horse. Outside his tent.



Figure 6: Top left hand corner: Legacy Badge 1992 after Frederick Little passed away. Top right hand corner (left to right): 1939-1945 Star, Pacific Star, War Medal 1939-1945, Australian Service Medal 1939-1945. Bottom left: Military Badges Bottom Middle: 60th Anniversary of the end of WWII Medal Bottom right: Front Line Service Badge

Little was first transferred to Papua New Guinea, August 3, 1943 to fight in the Gallipoli Campaign, alongside Ronald, after previously being a part of the 3rd Light Horse Regiment. Discharge papers state Little spent a total of 449 days outside Australia and 1000 days in Australia during this service in the AIF⁹. After having fought in New Guinea, Little disembarked to Tarakan, a small island located off the coast of Borneo, Indonesia on March 28, 1945; Tarakan was the first to be the series of operations in and around Borneo to be recaptured¹⁰. During his service, Little did some scouting on the front line. Towards the end of the war he was promoted from Private to a Corporal, one below a Sargent. During his service, Little only returned home twice. He returned home without pay December 3, 1945, for two months, just in time for Christmas and a 'little yellow from the atebrim ananti-malaria drug'¹¹.

Although Little would rarely talk about the war, one story he tells from 1944, was when he and his patrol partner were out on patrol on the Kokoda Trail, they had both fallen sick after contracting malaria. Eventually, they were found by American

⁵ Roma Little, Interview with author, April 14, 2019

⁶ Department of Veterans' Affairs - Australia. (2012). *Kokoda*. Canberra: Dept Vet. Affairs

⁷ Lawrie.M, "Priceless memories of a 'Rat'", Coastal Leader, September 1, 2011

⁸Bbc.co.uk. (n.d.). *BBC - WW2 People's War - JAPANESE TORTURE TECHNIQUES*. [online] Available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/history/ww2peopleswar/stories/37/a4865637.shtml> [Accessed 7 May 2019]

⁹ Roma Little, Interview with author, April 14, 2019

¹⁰ Awm.gov.au. (2019). *Tarakan*. [online] Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/PL1939> [Accessed 7 May 2019]

¹¹ Roma Little, Interview with author, April 14, 2019

troops, passed out. When Fred woke in hospital he asked the nurse what day it was, she replied with the date. Little then stated, "It was my 21st birthday yesterday"¹².

Little was an avid wrestler during and after the war. He won the Middle-Weight Amateur Wrestling Title of the South East, 1942. Previously a spruiker, Little turned professional in 1943 winning the Light Heavy-Weight Titles of 2/48th Battalion¹³.



Figure 7: 2/48th Battalion Emblem. A platypus over a boomerang.

The 2/48th Battalion was Australia's most highly decorated battalions of the Second World War, being awarded four Victoria Crosses (three of them posthumously) and more than 80 other decorations¹⁴. Little's battalion represented the Emblem with the design of a platypus with a boomerang on top (See Figure 7).



Figure 8: Frederick and Roma Little, 1949.

Once Little returned home to on April 1, 1946 he was reunited with his sweetheart Gravestocks. The next year they married on January age of 24. The couple had their first child William on May 22, 1949 later adopting their daughter Roma, in 1958. Little leased a small farm and became carrier and super spreader, with his son William working with him for 11 years. Little became a horse trainer in the 1970's

Keith from war
Roma
13, 1947 at the
Fredrick Little
Margaret
a general

and ended up with 60 winners and 4 track records¹⁵. His most acclaimed horse was Rangers Son, winning 26 races. Little also trained Coranna, Near Monde, Near Mondes Gift, Berida and Queen of Tinti, just to name some. Fred returned to his love of boxing and ran a local boxing/wrestling club in Keith. His past professional wrestling career took him to wrestle in stadiums in Adelaide, West Melbourne, Brisbane and Cairns.



Figure 9: Frederick Little ready to play football in Keith.

Other than his family, wrestling and horses, Little's other great love in life was footy, and he was heavily involved in the Keith Football Club. Little held numerous senior positions and was responsible for the building of the first Keith Football clubrooms. Little played 311 A grade games and won 2 premierships in the B grade (See Figure 9). He was also heavily involved in the Tatiara League becoming a Life Member of the League and Keith Club. As time went on, Little became a well-respected community member. After the war he suffered severe headaches and migraines and following an eventful life, Little died from stomach cancer at the age of 69, on July 7, 1992; he was laid to rest in Keith.



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From a small rural town in South Australia, Little could never have imagined what experiences awaited him once enlisting in the Australian Imperial Force. At just 16 years of age, he was set to become a part of something that was far from 'Little', a fight for not the old world but the new one. Even though he is not here today his memory and service lives on.

Reference List

¹² Roma Little, Interview with author, April 14, 2019
¹³ Roma Little, Interview with author, April 14, 2019
¹⁴ Memorial, T. (2019). *2/48th Australian Infantry Battalion*. [online] Awm.gov.au. Available at: <https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/U56079> [Accessed 8 May 2019]
¹⁵ Roma Little, Interview with author, April 14, 2019

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