

## LESLIE GERARD CRAFT

Leslie Gerard Craft was born on the 26<sup>th</sup> September, 1911 in Dunedoo. The youngest of six boys, twins William (Billy) and Charlie, Albert, Claude, Fredrick James (who died at the age of two from Whooping Cough) and Les. It appears Les suffered most from the upheaval in their young lives.

Les was just four years old when his mother Margaret (Nee) Turner died in Nov. 1915. Leaving Les with his grandmother Catherine (Nee) Dolan until her death in Dec. 1916. At that point in time his lively 15-year-old twin brothers returned home from two years at boarding school. These were big changes in the home life of a, four to five year old boy. When aged six, Josephine (Nee) O'Keeffe became his stepmother of whom Les did not have fond memories. Greg was born the following year and I guess Josephine would have been preoccupied with her pregnancy and caring for her first baby. Another big change was in store for Les as when aged nine he had a completely new environment by moving from the country to the city of Sydney. His dad sold the Dunedoo store to O'Sullivan in 1926 due to him over buying the imported cars he was selling in Elizabeth Street Sydney opposite Hyde Park. Aged fourteen Les was sent to St Stanislaus, Bathurst where he was a boarder for two years. The twins, while at St Stannies, had each other for company and Claude had his brother Albert.

In his late teens, Les and the family moved back to Dunedoo where Josephine died in Nov. 1929 when he was eighteen years old. Aged nineteen in 1931 Les then had a second stepmother, Theresa (Nee) Schofield. Some short time latter his dad moved back to Sydney in the early 1930's Les stayed on at the Dunedoo property and worked the farm with his brothers.

With the changes in his environment, having a number of mothers, attending boarding school and the like, one could hardly say Les had a stable and loving home life. Judy believes her dad Claude coped because he had ten years of stability and his mother's love. Claude also had the benefit of a close sibling, as his brother Albert was only about eighteen months older than Claude. The closest to Les was Claude who was six years older then later his stepbrother Greg, who was seven years younger.

When Judy (Claude's daughter) started putting Charles' story together she was very aware of Les being disadvantaged. Looking closer at the events of his young life she felt a great sadness for him. We all have no doubt that these events contributed greatly to his instability as an adult.

Les was alone on the 600 acres (just east of Dunedoo) of the family property in the last 12 months before his father sold it. Les lost one of his toe's in a chaff-cutter accident while working on the farm. He worked the farm sowing, reaping and bagging wheat. The farm was sold because his father needed the money as a result of the great depression the country was in at that time. So Les had no one or nowhere to go at this stage in his life, which led him to travel from farm to farm, looking for work, food and shelter. He traveled through the outback

of N.S.W. then down into Victoria back into N.S.W. and then onto Queensland. It was in Queensland that he worked on a property as a loan boundary rider, leaving the homestead on horse back riding around the perimeter of the property repairing any damaged fencing to stop any rabbits or dingo dogs getting through. He would have to take his own food, water, tools and camping gear because his trip would take him three days before returning back to the homestead again. He worked for food like this for many years until he traveled to Sydney in approx. 1942. Les enlisted in the Army during the Second World War and severed in action at his first position in "Merauke" in Dutch New Guinea then he returned to Sydney. However he was reassigned into overseas action again this time in "Borneo" until his discharge in 1945.

He married Olive Mizpah Pausey 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1943 while still being enlisted in the army. They have two sons, John Richard born 17<sup>th</sup> May, 1945 and Robert Leslie born 9<sup>th</sup> December, 1949.

Olive and Les were married just six months after they met. Recently Olive said to Judy, "You know, I knew absolutely nothing about Les or his background when I married him." After Les was discharged from the army at the end of World War Two they lived at Auburn where they had a poultry farm with 10,000 chickens. Olive bought the Auburn property from her relatives. Les was also employed as a postman riding a pushbike doing two daily delivers six days a week. He then worked as a bread deliveryman with a draft horse and kart, Les would hand deliver the unwrapped full or half loafs of bread out of a cane carry bag. After he moved down the road and needed more bread he would put his fingers in his mouth and whistle the horse, calling the horse down to him where he would reload his basket once more. Olive worked at Jensen's the swimwear company. They both needed to work to supplement their income to pay for the high cost of feed for the chickens. In 1956 (The year T.V. started in Sydney) we moved to Brighton-Le-Sands where Les started to drive cars and trucks for many different companies for a living until he retired in 1981. He found it difficult to hold work for long periods due to his drinking problems.

Olive and Les remained married for twenty-two years but for Olive they were twenty-two very difficult years with painful memories. Les became a chronic alcoholic and irresponsible husband and father. Olive, (mum) is a wonderful, warm person who reared us two boys amidst great difficulties. She has every reason to be proud of her boys. John and his wife, Dianne, have two children, Catherine and Gregory. John is a Station Master at Mount Victoria Railway Station and Dianne is employed in the Country Link and City Rail Booking office at Lithgow Railway Station. Robert and his wife, Jennifer, have four sons, Geoffrey, David, Matthew and Paul. Robert is a Production Manager and Jennifer is a schoolteacher. They live at Illawong in Sydney.

When Les retired he wanted to get out of Sydney away from its pollution and the rat race as he called it so he rented a unit in Katoomba in the Blue Mountains until about 1987. While Les was living in Katoomba, Les, John and Robert (myself) in August 1985 went on a holiday together to visit sites, friends and family in and around Dunedoo, Cobbora, (Where his Grandparents William and Catherine, his mother Margaret and his two year old brother Fredrick are buried) the Talbragar River and Dubbo. This trip gave John and myself a great

deal of information about our father and the environment at the time Les and his family lived in the area. At one time we were walking through the Dunedoo cemetery when Les stopped and was looking down at one gravestone with a hard stern look. He said, "That bastard sold me a horse which died a year latter". The visit unearthed many other feelings and stories some were funny and some sad but John and myself gained a greater insight into our father's life.

In approx. 1990 Les moved to Springwood because he said it was getting to cold to live in Katoomba. While living in Springwood he was robbed and tied up in his rented unit. From this time on he went down hill to the point of having to be moved into a nursing home at Wentworth Falls. After several trips to the Katoomba Hospital along with his weakness and not being able to walk he was moved to the Burlington Nursing Home in Katoomba, where he passed away on Saturday evening the 27<sup>th</sup> June, 1992.

Les was a very honest, intelligent, hard working and straight talking man (who would have no hesitation telling you what was on his mind). He is buried in the Catholic section at the Katoomba cemetery. - God rest his soul.



This is a photo of Les in full army uniform and Olive on their wedding day, cutting their wedding cake at the reception, which was held at Olive's family home at 4 John Street Mascot. The Wedding was held at the C of E St. Matthews Church in Botany, on the 10<sup>th</sup> April, 1943.