

Pollie's son to war luminary

■ Peter McLady

LIEUTENANT-Colonel Charles Arthur Lee, the son of a long-serving New South Wales politician, fought in both the Boer War and World War I.

He became the commanding officer of the 4th Anzac Regiment, Imperial Camel Corps, in 1917. After falling ill on his return to Australia in early 1918, died on November 5, 1918, six days before the Armistice.

Charles was one of six sons and four daughters of Charles Alfred Lee and his wife Clara Jane. Charles Alfred Lee was the Member for the NSW Assembly seat of Tenterfield from 1884 to 1920. He lost two sons in World War I: Charles Arthur, and his younger brother Lionel, who died in April 1919 while in Egypt waiting to return to Australia.

At the outbreak of the Second Boer War, Charles Arthur Lee was a 1st Lieutenant in the NSW Mounted Rifles. On October 15, 1899, Charles resigned his commission so he could join the war in South Africa.

Charles enlisted as a private, as all vacancies for officers had been filled. He served with the 2nd NSW Mounted Regiment almost throughout the Second Boer War, rising to the rank of captain.

In the obituary written for Charles, *The Tenterfield Star*, detailed his service in South Africa:

"He was present when Cronje (General of the South African Republic's military forces) surrendered, and was then transferred to the Mafeking Front, where he contracted enteric fever.

“Considering his age, no soldier of Australia had seen more service than Lieutenant-Colonel Lee.

— Newspaper archives

After a very severe bout with this fell disease, which accounted for so many of the gallant Australian soldiers, he managed to recover, and was sent on leave to England. On arrival he was given the inestimable privilege of recuperating in a Recreation Home established by the late King Edward.”

Following his recovery, Charles returned to South Africa and served until the peace agreement was signed in May 1902. He returned to Australia for only a few weeks, travelling back to South Africa to take up a management position with a large gold mining company. Charles worked in South Africa for several years before moving to Stanthorpe, where he became co-owner and manager of the Beverley Tin Mining Syndicate.

At the outbreak of World War I, Charles re-enlisted for active service on March



REMEMBRANCE: Charles Arthur Lee is on the honour boards in both Stanthorpe and Tenterfield for his services.

PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED

20, 1915, aged 40. He was commissioned as Captain in the 5th Light Horse Regiment and promoted to Major on May 1. Charles left Brisbane on active service on June 16 aboard *HMAT Borda*, joining the 5th Light Horse Regiment on the Gallipoli Peninsula on October 25.

The Tenterfield Star reported, “(Charles) served

mentioned in dispatches. The first on September 3 and again on October 13, when he was Mentioned in Dispatches by General Sir Archibald Murray, Commander of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force. On January 24, 1917 Charles was promoted to Lieutenant Colonel. On February 7 Charles was appointed to command the 4th Anzac Regiment, Imperial Camel Corps and transferred to battalion headquarters.

In late November 1917, the 4th Anzac Regiment was pursuing the retreating Turkish Army in Palestine. At the time, the Allied frontline formed a curve from the Mediterranean Sea running south east to the Jerusalem-Nablus road. On November 25, the Regiment moved across the Plain of Sharon to a position 13km north east of Jaffa known as Bald Hill. It is here that Charles' time in command of the 4th Anzac Regiment may have ended somewhat controversially. Describing the events, George and Edmee Langley wrote in their book *Sand, Sweat, and Camels*:

“The Brigade was beginning to feel the strain of continuous marching and fighting and it was welcome news therefore that they were to be relieved from Bald Hill. It was a place they all hated. The full story of Bald Hill will never be fully known, but a court of enquiry was set up and took evidence two days after the Camel Corps left. What their decision was no one ever heard, but Colonel Lee of the 4th Battalion left the Brigade a



LATE LIEUT. COLONEL C. A. LEE

Charles Arthur Lee is fondly remembered.

few days later for Australia. Whether he was to blame or not it is hard to say, but after his failure to relieve the New Zealanders in time at Ras el Nagh he was definitely out of favour. He could not have prevented the men being shelled out of their posts at Bald Hill as the posts were not properly entrenched. However, he did not appear to have any outpost line beyond the posts during the day and there was no depth in his defence, so that the grazing camels up near the posts afforded excellent targets when the enemy did commence shelling.

Charles left Egypt on December 28, 1917 aboard *HMAT Tofua*, acting as Officer Commanding Troops, arriving in Australia on January 30, 1918.

Charles suffered shell shock and the effects of gas in Jordan and was given home leave. Back in Australia his condition



Charles Arthur Lee is buried in Tenterfield, where he died after returning from World War I.

became worse and he spent five months in a Brisbane military hospital. He had returned to his father's home in Tenterfield about a week when his condition became serious and he died, aged 44, at his father's home “Claremont”

He was accorded a full military funeral and buried in the Tenterfield cemetery.

The Tenterfield Star wrote, “Considering his age, no soldier of Australia had

seen more service than Lieutenant-Colonel Lee, nor could anyone have worked harder or more nobly for his country.”

Two of Charles' brothers also enlisted in World War I. Captain Frederick Edward Lee served on the Western Front and returned to Australia unscathed. His other brother, Sergeant Lionel Kenneth Lee, fought with the 11th Light Horse Regiment.