PUT TO REST: Before he could sail from Egypt, Lionel Lee was admitted to hospital and died from typhus. He was buried the same day at the Ismailia Cemetery in Egypt.

PHOTOS: CONTRIBUTED

Lionel Lee's grave at the Ismailia War Memorial Cemetery, Egypt.

Fever claims decorated hero

Charge at Beersheba makes headlines around the world with help from Lee

■ **Peter McLady**

LIONEL Lee, fought at Gallipoli and rode in the famous charge of the light horse in the Battle of Beersheba. He was the last soldier from the Granite Belt to die in World War I.

Together with his brother Charles, he is remembered with honour on both the Stanthorpe and Tenterfield War Memorials.

Lionel and Charles were the sons of Charles Alfred Lee and his wife Clara Jane. Charles senior held the seat of Tenterfield in the NSW Legislative Assembly between 1884 and 1920.

Lionel, one of the first men to enlist from the Granite Belt, died of typhus in April 1919 while in Egypt waiting to be shipped back to Australia.

His brother, Lieutenant Colonel Charles Lee, had died of the effects of shellshock while at home in Tenterfield five months earlier.

Lionel was born in Tenterfield on October 30, 1882, one of six sons and four daughters born to Charles and Clara Lee. He went to school in Tenterfield and spent the greater part of his life in the district.

Lionel was working as a tin miner and cattle dealer before enlisting in Stanthorpe on January 13, 1915, aged 32 years. He and his brother Charles were co-owners of the Beverley Tin Mining Syndicate at Stanthorpe.

Upon enlistment, Lionel had already had significant military experience having served as a corporal in the Tenterfield Squadron of the NSW Mounted Rifles between 1899 and 1903.

It appears that Lionel had left Australia to live in South Africa as he served as a trooper in the South African Light Horse at Johannesburg, Transvaal, 1908-10. His brother Charles

lived in South Africa at the same time, working for a large gold mining company

Following his enlistment, Lionel joined "A" Squadron of the 11th Light Horse Regiment with the rank of private.

The 11th Light Horse Regiment was formed in February 1915 and consisted of "A" and "B" Squadrons

reformed and Lionel rejoined his old regiment on February 22, 1916. At the time, he was a patient in the 3rd Auxiliary Hospital at Heliopolis suffering severe dental problems.

His brother Charles joined the 11th Light Horse Regiment the same day.

The 11th Light Horse moved to a new training

> **For four years he was in khaki, going right through the Gallipoli and Palestine campaign.**
>
> — Casino and Kyogle Courier, 1919

from Queensland and "C" Squadron from South Australia.

Together with "A" and "C" Squadrons, Lionel left Brisbane on active service aboard *HMAT Medic* on June 2. Following a stopover in Sydney, the *Medic* was continuing its voyage when it was ordered to proceed to Adelaide where the regiment's horses were offloaded. Unknown Lionel, he was to sail to Egypt and join the fighting at Gallipoli as an infantryman.

On August 24, the regiment was ordered to Alexandria from where it would sail for Gallipoli. Lionel landed at Anzac Cove on the night of August 28 and made his way to Rest Gully. The regiment was divided into three sections with "A" Squadron being attached to the 2nd Light Horse Regiment then fighting in the frontline at Pope's Hill.

Lionel was promoted to Lance Corporal and fought with the 2nd Light Horse at Pope's Hill, the Old No.3 Outpost, Destroyer Hill and Camel Hump.

The 11th Light Horse was

camp at Tel-el-Kebir where Lionel was admitted again to hospital, now suffering from appendicitis.

He was discharged on May 6 and joined the regiment in its move to the defend the Suez Canal. The regiment took up a frontline position, 13km from the Suez Canal, at the Serapeum Railhead, where it was in range of enemy aerial bombing.

On August 3, a German-led Ottoman force launched an offensive on the Allied positions at Romani. Corporal Frank Curran from Tenterfield was killed in this action. Lionel and the 11th Light Horse joined the attack against the retiring enemy troops.

"B" Squadron, under the command of Major Charles Lee, and the 11th Light Horse, together with the other units of the Desert Column, pursued the enemy across the Sinai for 12 days. In this action, the 11th Light Horse suffered significant casualties: five men killed, 12 wounded, and one man missing (Hammond 1942, 47).

Major Charles Lee left the 11th Light Horse to take up command of the 4th Camel

Battalion on October 9. Lionel was promoted to sergeant on November 4 but was admitted to hospital two weeks later.

He spent seven days in the No. 14 Australian General Hospital, near Cairo, suffering from a foreign body injury to his right foot.

On July 7, Lionel was admitted to the Citadel Military Hospital in Cairo where he remained for two weeks.

He spent a further two weeks recovering at the Convalescent Depot at Abbassia where upon discharge, he was posted to the 4th Light Horse training Regiment. Lionel rejoined the 11th Light Horse on September 19.

The 11th Light Horse moved from its base at Tel el Fara on October 28, in preparation for the Battle of Beersheba. Three days later, the Allied attack on Beersheba had stalled, and General Chauvel decided that only a cavalry charge would save the day. The 11th Light Horse, as part of the 4th Australian Brigade, led the charge.

"At 4.30, the first line of Australian horsemen went over the ridge at a trot which soon developed into a hard gallop, as the troopers, with bayonets flashing in their hands, warmed to the occasion and spurred their mounts onward. A second and third line followed at intervals of 300 yards, and, ere long, the great plain echoed to the beat of a thousand horses. The spectacle of Light Horsemen, with bayonets in their hands, charging infantrymen in strongly entrenched positions, was something quite unique in the history of warfare in any period, and the boldness of

the charge and its unparalleled success, fired the imagination of the British peoples. The newspapers in England, Australia and America flashed the news around the world in bold headlines" (Hammond 1942, 81-82).

Lionel survived the Battle of Beersheba, and the further battles fought by the 11th Light Horse, as it joined the pursuit of the retreating Ottoman forces through Sheria, Jerusalem, the Jordan Valley, Bethlehem, and northwards from Damascus.

The 11th Light Horse fought as far as Homs and was in camp at Tripoli when news of the Armistice was received. In March 1919, Lionel was stationed at Moascar, Egypt, waiting to be shipped back to Australia. On his A.I.F. Demobilisation Form he wrote:

"Since embarkation the deaths of my Mother & Brother have taken place and I am an interested party in both Estates, which owing to my absence on Active Service, cannot be attended until my return."

Upon his return to Australia, Lionel planned to live in Stanthorpe and resume his work with the Beverley Tin Mining Syndicate.

Lionel Lee was a decorated serviceman.

On March 29, before he could sail from Egypt, Lionel was admitted to hospital suffering from gallstones. Two days later he was listed as dangerously ill with cholecystitis.

Sergeant Lionel Kenneth Lee died of typhus at the 26th Stationary Hospital, Ismailia, on April 5, 1919. He was buried by Chaplain A.F. Day in the Ismailia Cemetery the same day.

Lionel's death was reported in the *Casino and Kyogle Courier* on April 12, 1919:

"When the Great War broke out he was one of the first to enlist. For four years he was in khaki, going right through the Gallipoli and Palestine campaign. It is particularly sad to think that he came through the furnace of war scathless to fall a victim to the dreaded typhus fever. Only last month his father received a very cheery letter from him stating that he was well, but felt worn out, and was endeavouring to get home leave. The letter stated that he was then in Tripoli, and he expressed the hope that it would not be long before he returned to Tenterfield with the stirring story of the little-known campaign amongst the deserts of Northwest Africa."