

LANCE CORPORAL W. J. (Bill) ELLIS.

KILLED ACTION 19-12-1952.



Bill and his Wife Daphne 1950

Bill Ellis had all the qualifications to be a member of the Returned and Services League, but he never had the opportunity to join the Sub-Branch, for he was killed in action in Korea. Bill's is a typical story of popular and dynamic young fellows meeting their death, not always because of loyalty to the Nation, but because of economic times, responsibility to the family and the will to succeed. Whenever the chips came down these fellows were loyal to the cause, the Nation, their fellow servicemen, no matter whether in Darwin, New Guinea, Korea or anywhere. It touches on the responsibility, too, that the Army accepted for the sustenance of his widow and daughter, and that Legacy contributed in a small way, to the education of his daughter. More dramatically it touches on the catastrophic effect of his daughter's deep suspicion for nigh on forty years that her father in some way had abandoned both her mother and her, by volunteering for service in a War Zone.

Bill's father Charles, a WW1 veteran of the ANZACS in Gallipoli. He migrated to Western Australia, left the South West Group Settlement Scheme and took his wife Ruby and family to Harvey, where Bill was born. A neighbour, Kitty Smith, then an eight year old girl, had a real doll to nurse. That is how, over the years, a strong friendship with Kitty, later Mrs Ted King, prospered. We find Charles a loyal member of the Harvey RSL Sub-Branch, attending all Anzac Services. At the age of fourteen years, Bill, a well-developed and handsome lad, with a keen sense of humour, was a very capable boxer. Some local Harvey people organised a boxing bout with a visiting 21 year old English sailor, and Bill ably quitted himself. A few years later Bill's family came to North Beach.

Bill married a North Beach girl, Daphne Sabine, who lived in Ada Street. During 1950 his daughter Caryl was born. With some members of his family he participated in a carrying business. The Metal Trades strike of that era had a profound impact on their business. Money was short, and it appears that Bill was very conscious of his obligation to wife and daughter. He had to get a job and the Army had vacancies. Bill enlisted, but initially not for overseas service.

The History books state that the troops for Korea were mainly selected from the 65th, 66th and 67th Battalions, part of the Occupational Forces in Japan. Out of that body the Royal Australian Regiment, comprising the 1st, 2nd and 3rd Battalions, was formed, the honour of 'Royal' being bestowed on the 22-11-48, the celebrated birth date of the Regiment. Bill was told by an old timers' who had served overseas in

World War Two that he would not get very far in the Australian Army unless he experienced overseas service. He therefore volunteered for duties in Korea and joined the 1st Battalion.

Bill posted a parcel to Kitty King's mother, Mrs Smith, of Harvey, on the 9th December 1952, for that is the post mark date on the neatly sewn calico parcel that your editor clearly witnessed. It contained a photo Album, obviously purchased in Korea, as a Christmas present for Mrs Smith. Ten days after mailing the parcel, on the 19th December 1952, whilst on night patrol duties in Korea, acting as Sergeant, leading his section, Bill stepped on a land mine. Apparently, he knew that he had tripped the mechanism of the mine, for he stood still whilst he called a warning to his men, who dived for cover. (The anti-personnel land mines as used at that time were 'armed' by a person standing on them, causing the mechanism to make a 'click' noise. They exploded as soon as the weight was released. Ed).

Bill's death is recorded in the book "Australia in the Korean War" (* see hereunder). It is recorded that when a patrol commanded by Lt Boyd, who appears to be O/C No 10 platoon, accidentally entered a mine-field at the foot of Hill 227 (Fanny Hill). Bill, the Forward Scout, was killed and that Boyd and Pte Cupitt were wounded. They were eventually rescued by their Sgt Corcoran, (later Premier of S.A.) organising a squad. After forty one years it is difficult to find and interview any of the troops that were with him at that tragic night. That he called a warning to his men and the circumstances of his death was related by a stranger to Kitty and Ted King, of Harvey, at a dance, some years ago. Efforts have been instituted to contact some of his associates on that dangerous mission. (See Can You Help, West Australian 3-7-93). Ron Cross, a close fellow serviceman friend, stated that Bill had a premonition that he would not return, whilst his brother Don felt that Bill had a feeling that nothing would go wrong with him.

The Christmas parcel arrived at the Smith household the day after the news of Bill's death. After opening the parcel Mrs Smith informed her daughter Kitty that the album should be put away and given to Billy's baby daughter as soon as they met her. That meeting did not take place for forty years, by which time Mrs Smith had died. Kitty, long married to Ted King, was an elderly lady herself, but still holding on to the parcel.

When Daphne went along to claim a War Widow's pension at the appropriate office there was some confusion, for apparently there were not many Western Australians with dependents meeting their deaths in the services at that phase of time. Bill had also taken out an insurance policy, the small print showing some confusing words to the effect that death must occur more than twelve months after enlisting or being posted. The family were only able to collect, because more than twelve months had elapsed from the date of Bill's enlistment due to him being unfit to leave Fremantle with his original posting, and not having commenced his tour of duty until the next round of departures from Sydney.

Caryl did not know her father. Over the years she created the belief that Bill had abandoned his wife and her. As she went through her teen-age years, often shorter of money than many of her fellow scholars, and struggling to gain a University Degree, she alternated between feelings of rage at her father and self-pity at having been so hardly done by. Legacy contributed what help it could and the Defence Department, because of her academic progress, extended its support through to Post Graduate Studies.

The economic years in which Caryl was maturing saw much development in Western Australia. The development of the Oil Refinery, followed by the discovery of the massive deposits of iron ore and the great reserves of natural gas, brought much wealth to many people. Young maturing people throughout the affluent sixties and seventies did not realise just what slumps meant to families and the community. Caryl did not consider the fact that Bill, with possibly some creditors, had seen the Army as an avenue in which he could get financial relief and support for his family. His case was typical of many men of the 1939 era, initially joining the Army for financial relief, but never flinching in the service of the Nation.

Daphne had moved to the country and remarried. Throughout most of those forty years Caryl chose, quite deliberately, to have no contact with Bill's brothers, Don and Gerry, and their families. In 1992, backed by

support and caring from members of the Centre for Attitudinal Healing, Caryl came to finally understand that the only person being punished by her anger at Bill's death, and apparent 'abandonment', was herself. She then contacted her Uncle Don, who took her to Harvey to meet the Kings. They put her in touch with people who had known and loved Bill during his childhood and had been close friends of her Grandparents whom she had never known.

The laughter and the stories told by the Kings in 1992, finally convinced Caryl that her father was a man who loved life, his wife and his daughter and who had simply made the best choices that he knew to take care of them all.

It was with a deep sense of love and respect for the man, her father, Lance Corporal W.J.Ellis, 5/1677, that Caryl has approached the North Beach Sub-Branch for some memorial to him.

The two Remembrance Rocks placed at the front of the Elected Members section of the City of Stirling Council Chambers make no reference to the Korean War. Members of the Korea and South East Asia Forces Association refer to the Korean War as 'The Forgotten War'. One caller has advised that there is a Korean War memorial in Melville. Many of Bill and Caryl's relatives live in the North Beach and adjacent areas. May this epistle stimulate some interest in the community so that the troops who served in Korea, ever loyal to this Nation, to their fellow soldiers and service personnel, to their families and the community in general, are suitably recognised.

The Korean War, being a United Nations War, saw the Australian soldiers not a part of an Australian Force acting with the Australian Air Force and Navy, but as individual small components attached to the much larger forces of Britain and the United States. Yet the Australian Army suffered 277 fatalities and 1210 wounded. Combat casualties were also suffered by the Navy (2f 28w) and the Air Force (280, but the total number serving has been difficult to ascertain because of the nature of their operations and allocations. Perhaps this is the reason that not a lot of the general public goodwill has emerged for these fine servicemen.

"Australia in the Korean War 1950-53" by Dr R. O'Neill, Director of the International Institute for Strategic Studies, London. The volume mentions the difficulty of obtaining the intimate facts, for at that phase of time, inter alia, Australia did not have its own set of War Diaries as the Australian Regiment was under the jurisdiction of the British Commonwealth Brigade and the records are in the British Ministry of Defence.(see p. 751).