A Little war hero

Old Boy David Little ’60 has a strong family connection to Brisbane Grammar School that spans four generations and dates back to the early 1900s when his father and uncle attended the School.

David’s father William Arthur Little (1914), uncle Edwin Maurice Little (1910), son Andrew Little ’87 and now grandson Oliver Hudson ’25 have all walked through the BGS gates as students.

The Little family attended a special Remembrance Day Ceremony at the School to mark the centenary of the Armistice, 100 years after 11 November 1918. The School’s iconic Golden Book, on display in the War Memorial Library, was opened to the pages focusing on David’s father and uncle and their World War I service. A war hero, David’s uncle Maurice was severely injured at Quinn’s Post in Gallipoli in May 1915.

Official war records indicate that Maurice was throwing ‘jam tin’ bombs at the retreating Turkish enemy who had broken into and occupied the Australian front line at Quinn’s Post on 29 May 1915. For these crude bombs to be effective it was necessary to cut the fuse in half and hold them momentarily before throwing. While kneeling to throw one such bomb it exploded in Maurice’s hand causing multiple upper body injuries including the loss of both eyes and his right hand, which was amputated. A casualty list published in the press listed Maurice as killed in action.

In the historical account compiled by Charles Bean, he recounts the words of Major Durrant, commander of the 13th Battalion. Durrant witnessed the action and stated, ‘I saw him [Maurice] a couple of minutes afterwards, when he looked a pitiable sight, covered in blood, his right forearm a bleeding stump and his face cut to ribbons. He was quite conscious and said, ‘We have got them beaten alright!’ Such was the determination of the defenders of Quinn’s Post.

Following six months in hospital and life saving surgeries, Maurice returned to Australia by ship. He later became a guest speaker at rallies supporting the Federal Government’s conscription campaign.

It was perhaps inevitable that Maurice’s younger brother, and David’s father, William enlisted at age 20 in November 1917. William was assigned to the Light Horse Reinforcements which served in Palestine and was engaged at Es Salt, Amman, Jordan Valley.

Despite physical incapacities, Maurice refused to be pitied and went on to master braille and write widely. In 1923, the Queensland Book Depot published Maurice’s book, Sonnets and Other Verses. The preface was written by BGS Headmaster Bousfield and contained poems referencing WWI, including his well-known verse Nil Sine Labore extolling the virtues of Our Motto in the field of battle.

Maurice went on to become the Founding President of the Sherwood RSSILA, and stood for State Parliament to better the cause of returned servicemen. He later travelled to London and studied economics at Oxford.

Maurice died in London in 1938, aged 45.

Eighty years later, David proudly showed his uncle’s braille pocket watch with raised numerals — a gift to Maurice from the Queensland Government in recognition of his service in public life. David’s wife Marlene wore Maurice’s gold cufflinks and gold medallion to the 2018 Remembrance Day Ceremony in honour of her husband’s father and uncle. As supporters of the Memorial War Library upgrade, Marlene and David were guests along with other donors. A special memorial marked the first occasion the building was used following a major refurbishment to the building itself and the garden precinct surrounds.

A strong supporter of Campaign 2020, and champion of the 1960 Year Group Bursary, David — a former School Captain — is passionate about giving back to BGS and providing the chance for others to gain the same opportunities his family has benefitted from by attending the School.