

# Charles Augustus Murray Littler

## Deeds not words

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The end of the story of Charles Augustus Murray Littler is held within the land our two feet are standing on in this very moment. His story will reveal what has led us to be here at Mouquet Farm in the year of 2016. The beginning, however, occurred in the city of Launceston, Tasmania on the 26 March 1868.

Parents, Augustus Littler and wife Hannah Murray, in the year of 1868 were oblivious that in 46 years a Great War would break out and their son would be a main contender, unfortunately, leading him to his death.

During Charles' early years he was educated at Launceston High School and in 1888, at the age of 20 he moved to my current hometown of Devonport. The family home was and still remains at 155 Steele Street, Devonport, Tasmania, named 'Sillwood.'

Charles Littler worked as a bank clerk in the Bank of Van Diemen's Land. However, when the bank became insolvent, he then travelled to Zeehan on horseback, setting up a tent, with nothing but a pistol to keep himself safe, officially managing what was the Zeehan Bank for two years; all by August 1891. His grandson, Jock Littler described him to be, "*a whiz when it came to numbers.*" Back in Devonport on the 26 January, 1892, he married Helen Thomas. They had two sons Guy and Geoff.

After working as a produce merchant in 1897, Charles then became the manager of the North-West Farmer's Association in Devonport. He served in the Tasmanian defence force; in 1902 he was commissioned and in 1904 became a provisional captain with the Tasmanian Rangers.

In July 1904, Charles left Tasmania to go abroad to the Philippines, running a stevedoring agency with his brother-in-law until 1909. During this time, he served with American forces, was granted an honorary commission by the Russian Navy and undertook intelligence work for the British Navy. He chose to live in Manila and work as an agent of trade for the Tasmanian Government. Due to financial problems and the urging of his wife's concerns of their son's education, Charles returned to Tasmania in early 1914. With the outbreak of war, Charles had no hesitation enlisting as a lieutenant in the Australian Imperial Force on the 16 December. His two sons both enlisting as well. When asked why a man of his age had enlisted, Jock explained that the family motto was, "*Deeds not words.*"

In Melbourne on the 2 February, 1915, he embarked for Egypt with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Reinforcements 12<sup>th</sup> Battalion. After landing on Gallipoli on the 25 April, he was soon promoted to captain and given command of the beach parties. As he was responsible for the loading and unloading of stores and equipment, his previous experience proving a great advantage, him and his beach parties (consisting of many rebellious soldiers put on beach duties as punishment) worked tirelessly, ensuring supplies were always available. His son Geoff was at Gallipoli during this time and kept a journal which took place over several months. He mentions his father quite frequently and they saw each other often:

*“Thursday, 21<sup>st</sup> October - Had breakfast with father this morning and got a good supply of newspapers from him.” “Monday 13<sup>th</sup> December ...went down to see father and had a good feed.”*

As a result of his role as beach commandant, he played a significant role in the evacuation of the Anzacs and was debatably the last of them to leave. Stan Watson, the last soldier that Charles sent to aboard the boat, wrote to Geoff confirming that Charles was definitely, as he recalled, the last Anzac to leave Gallipoli. Watson contacted Charles Bean and made sure that the correct information was written in his books. Bean replying with, *“My Dear Watson. I am sorry that the account in Vol. VI is incorrect in that detail.”* Watson writes to Geoff saying, *“...when I heard for the first time from Dr. Bean of Capt. Littler’s terrible death in 1916, I have felt that I must somehow let his people know of his being the last man to leave...”* Watson gifted the Australian War Memorial the Will page out of an Army Paybook in which Charles in 1915 has inscribed, *“Capt.S.H. Watson was the last officer I sent on board at North Beach on the evacuation of Anzac’ Signed C.A Littler Capt. Beach Commander.”* Charles earned the name and was widely known as the ‘Duke of Anzac;’ obtaining the well-deserved Distinguished Service Order Award.

Charles followed along with the AIF and returned to Egypt after Gallipoli. There he was appointed commandant at Moascar Camp, near Ismailia on the Suez Canal. In March 1916, he was transferred into the newly formed 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion which embarked for France in June; both his sons were already there. July saw the opening of the Battle of the Somme and on the morning of September the 3<sup>rd</sup>, Charles was to lead his troops into battle, unaware that it would be his last. He was sick with malaria, the doctor instructing that he was not fit to fight. Along with this, his son Geoff was injured due to a shrapnel hit to the face and he had been granted permission to take leave and go to his son’s bedside. Despite all of this, he still chose to fight with the 52<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. He showed great courage and his act was a clear example of *“Deeds, not words.”*

Charles’ went into battle at approximately 5:10am, at this location of Mouquet Farm, leading his platoon to attack a German machine-gun post. He was armed with only his walking stick, the same he had had on Gallipoli. He refused to carry the usual officer’s revolver. He claimed, *“I have never done so, and I don’t see why I should begin now.”* It became iconic amongst the troops and was seen as a signal. He was badly wounded during the initial attack, but was helped on by a junior officer, saying, *“I will reach that trench if the boys do.”* His second in command, Maxwell, recounts where he found Charles’ with leg and chest wounds during the battle. Maxwell asked for his walking cane so he could continue waving the troops on as they began to retreat. Despite his constant bravery and courage, he received more wounds to the head from the machine gun shots at close range. Charles Littler died on the edge of the German trenches. It is believed he was buried in a mass grave here at Mouquet Farm by the Canadian Forces who relieved the Anzacs and took the farm on the 16 September. His body will remain here forever.

Both of his sons returned back home to Australia safely, Guy winning the military cross and continuing his career into World War Two.

Charles Bean recalls Charles Littler as a *‘brave, honourable and experienced leader, the whole battalion looked up to him as to no other’*. However, Bean also is quoted that he often spoke his mind to achieve better conditions for his men and goes on to say *“his slowness of promotion was due to an unfortunate outspokenness”*. He even referred to him as the *‘best personality on Anzac beach.’*

Charles Littler was not only a Captain and a soldier. He was a human being with aspirations and morals, just like you and I. He paid the ultimate price, not only for Australia, his life was lost to create a better life for us. *"Deeds not words."*



Lest we forget.

Researched by Caitlin Argent  
Ogilvie High School