

Haywood, Leslie Henry (SX9752 AIF)



Image 1 © Dawn QUEALE) family collection 2016

Name	Haywood, Leslie Henry Private AIF
Service Number	SX9752
Date of Birth	14th February 1913
Died	23rd October 1972
Place of Birth	Serviceton, VIC
Resident	Victor Harbor SA
Cemetery	Victor Harbor Cemetery

Leslie (Les) Henry Haywood was born at Serviceton, Victoria on 14 February 1913, one of twelve children of George Henry Haywood and Eva Haywood (nee Merrett). Les was educated at Renmark Public School and after the family moved to the Mount Compass area in 1924, he attended Nangkita Public School. On leaving school, he worked on the family farm.

Les enlisted in the 2nd AIF on 26 July 1940. At the time Les and his wife, Gwendoline Adelaide Haywood (nee Wickman), were living at Victor Harbor. His brother George had enlisted in the 2nd AIF two weeks earlier and after basic training, both were posted to the 2/48th Infantry Battalion.

On 17 November 1940, the Battalion, along with other units, boarded the HMT Stratheden, at Outer Harbour and sailed the next day. Other ships and escorts, including the HMAS Canberra and Sydney, soon joined it. Both of these ships would later be lost in sea battles. The convoy berthed at El Kantara, Egypt on 17 December, where the men disembarked and entrained to their camp at Dimra, Palestine and underwent a rigid programme of training.

With the enemy advances and successes against British positions in North Africa, the 2/48th Battalion, along with other units, was sent to the front. The Axis Forces were led by General Erwin Rommel. The Allies' initial advance west of Tobruk was halted and a retreat was ordered back to Tobruk. By early April 1941, they were outside of Tobruk and the 2/48th was assigned a front of great tactical importance. Over the next six months, the Tobruk garrison was subjected to numerous enemy aerial, artillery and mortar bombardments and armoured and infantry assaults. The port was of great strategic importance and Rommel was desperate to capture it in order to shorten his supply line. The 2/48th suffered many casualties in the defence of their perimeter and also in its own attacks upon the enemy. Medical supplies, rations and water remained in short supply throughout the siege. The only supply route for the garrison was by sea and Allied ships were subjected to constant enemy aerial attack.

In June 1941, the British forces based in Egypt launched a plan to relieve the garrison but this failed after only three days as they suffered heavy losses in men and tanks. The besieged garrison fought on for another four months. Just after midnight on 23 October 1941, the Battalion was relieved and

the men boarded British destroyers for the fast voyage to Alexandria. The 2/48th then travelled to Palestine where they re-formed and re-equipped.

In June 1942, the Battalion was ordered back to Egypt. Rommel had captured Tobruk and the enemy forces were advancing east to the Egyptian frontier. The first Battle of El Alamein was fought between 1-27 July and the Allies managed to blunt the Axis attack. Les was evacuated on 26 July suffering from dysentery and was hospitalised for a month. The Second Battle of El Alamein commenced on 23 October and the fighting was even more intense and bitter. Pte George Haywood was killed in action on the night of 25-26 October 1942. By 7 November, the battle was over and Axis forces were in retreat.

With the Japanese threat in the Pacific, the Australians sailed for home and on 1 February 1943, they boarded the convoy troopship Nieuw Amsterdam, which by then had 6,800 men board, and filled to capacity. The convoy sailed at full speed to avoid enemy submarines operating in the Indian Ocean. By 25 February, the men had arrived at Melbourne.

The Battalion later moved to the Atherton Tablelands in Queensland to ready themselves for the coming battles in New Guinea. On 24 May 1943, Les became ill and was evacuated to 2/6th Australian General Hospital and remained hospitalised until 2 July.

On 15 November 1943, he was granted leave without pay to help with valuable farm work. Les was discharged from the army on 16 December 1943.

After the war Les was employed as a woodcutter and builder at Victor Harbor. There were eight children of the marriage. Leslie Henry Haywood died at Victor Harbor on 23 October 1972 and was buried in the Victor Harbor Cemetery.

Editor's note: a large number of photographs of Les and George's war service are held by Les' daughter Dawn QUEALE (nee Haywood). These have been scanned and are included in the service narrative compiled by the Victor Harbor RSL, a copy of which is held in the Clubroom's library collection.

References:

GLENN, John, Tobruk to Tarakan: The Story of the 2/48th Battalion, Rigby Limited, Adelaide (1960).

Leslie Henry (Les) HAYWOOD. (2026). Vwma.org.au. [accessed 03/08/2025]
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<https://recordsearch.naa.gov.au/SearchNRRetrieve/Interface/ViewImage.aspx?B=6397025>

Compiled by the Victor Harbor RSL History Research Team, February 2016. Updated by T.Young 03/08/2025

Appendix



Image 2 © Dawn *QUEALE*) family collection 2016

Les and Gwen Haywood with their two eldest children Dawn and Des sitting on the lawns of the War Memorial Gardens, Flinders Parade, Victor Harbor. Les was on pre-embarkation leave (15-23 October 1940).



Image 3 © Dawn *QUEALE*) family collection 2016

Les was on pre-embarkation leave (1940) and was taken on the lawns of the War Memorial Gardens, Victor Harbor. From left: Pte Les Haywood, sister Jean, father George, mother Eva, sister Grace and brother George who would perish at the hands of enemy forces in the Tel El Eisa on the 26th Oct 1942



Image 4 © Dawn QUEALE) family collection 2016

Les and his brother taken in the Middle East, early 1941

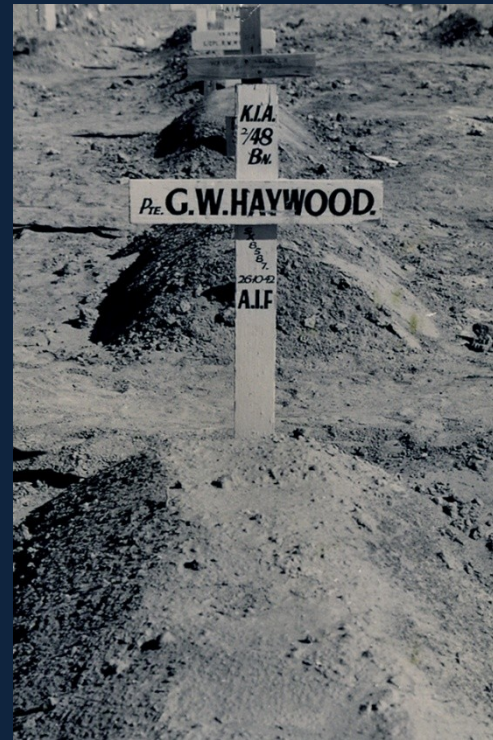


Image 5 © Dawn QUEALE) family collection 2016

View of George's grave at Tel el Eisa cemetery. George and fellow casualties were later reinterred in the El Alamein War Cemetery.



Image 6 © naa.gov.au 2025
Enlistment photograph.



Image 6 © Ian Milne 2015
Grave of Leslie Henry Haywood and his wife Gwendoline Adelaide Haywood at Victor Harbor Cemetery

