

## ***What Bull Allen was Like***

**Lucinda Horrocks, 2014**

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Leslie 'Bull' Allen was born in Ballarat in 1916 and had a hard upbringing. His father was a strict and unpleasant man, and Bull and his siblings spent some time in an orphanage, not because their father died but through poverty – a sad and not unusual story in the time of the Great Depression. Bull learnt his trade – farm work – at the Ballarat Orphanage Farm and before the war was a farm labourer, joining up at age 23 because he was out of work and needed the money.

Once joined up, Bull showed his larrikin streak and impatience with rules and regulations. Stories abound from his time in the Middle East of his willingness to buck military convention. But he was revered by his fellows for his commitment to rescuing the wounded, whatever it took. Though seemingly invincible, and calm in the face of gunfire, Allen suffered psychologically from the trauma of war. He spent some time in hospital in the Middle East for 'anxiety neurosis', the condition they called 'shell shock' in world war one, and a state we would call PTSD – post traumatic stress disorder – today. After Mt Tambu, the psychological impact on Bull was severe and he started displaying volatile, erratic behaviour. He eventually was discharged from the army for medical reasons, and by the time he got home in 1944 he had lost the power of speech. Family legend has it he was unrecognisable when he got back, and it took him six months of recuperation on his uncle's farm in Warrenheip before he could talk again.

Bull recovered to get married, raise a family, to work and to retire in Ballarat. But life after the war for, and with, Bull was often difficult. He suffered the invisible psychological scars of trauma the rest of his life. He died in 1982 and is buried in the Ballarat Cemetery.