Biography of Private Aubrey Davis

By Remy Casse

Aubrey Rowe Davis was born on the 14th of April 1885 at 22 East Street Brompton South Australia. He was the son of William and Elizabeth Lydia Davis.

Aubrey came from a Methodist Christian background and attended Hindmarsh public school in Hindmarsh South Australia. Aubrey had an older brother called F M Davis, and two sisters, one named Elizabeth Lydia Davis after their mother and another one whose married name was G H Folland.

After leaving School Aubrey worked as a labourer. Aubrey remained single all his life and never had any children. On the 13th of September 1915 Aubrey Rowe Davis enlisted in the Australian Imperial force (also known as the AIF) as a private at the age of 30. After enlisting he was assigned to the 10th battalion and given a regimental number which was 4460.

His medical examination at the time he enlisted describes him as being 5 foot 5 inches tall, 140 pounds with a fair complexion and brown hair and blue eyes. He also had a tattoo on his left forearm. It was also reported that he had excellent vision and was unvaccinated.

Private Aubrey Davis’ unit embarked from Adelaide, South Australia, on board HMAT A28 Miltiades on 7 February 1916. He eventually fought for his country on the Western Front in France and Belgium. His service record shows he suffered from chronic foot problems (trench foot) throughout the war which required frequent medical attention.

He was wounded in action in Messines, Belgium on 30th May 1918. Several hours later he succumbed to these injuries and died at 33 years old. He was buried in the La Kreule Military Cemetery Hazebrouck, France and his grave is located at Plot I, Row D, Grave No. 8.

Due to Aubrey’s military service he received two awards that included the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. Both medals were authorized in 1919 to commemorate the victory of the allied forces and to honour the services provided by them. As these medals were awarded posthumously to Private Aubrey Davis the Australian authorities had to contact his siblings to identify his oldest brother so he could receive the awards on Albury’s behalf.

When Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914, most Australians were very supportive as they identified with Britain as the “mother country”. Volunteers rushed to enlist for an exciting war which was expected to be over by Christmas. However, for Australia, the First World War remains the costliest conflict in terms of deaths and casualties. From a population of fewer than five million, 416,809 men enlisted, of which over 60,000 were killed and 156,000 wounded, gassed, or taken prisoner.

Soldiers in the Australian and New Zealand army corps (ANZACs) fought together at Gallipoli in 1915, and then afterwards at the Western Front in Europe and the Middle East.

On the Western Front, where Private Davis was, the war was fought by soldiers in trenches. Trenches were long, narrow ditches dug into the ground where soldiers lived. They were very muddy, uncomfortable and the toilets overflowed. These conditions caused some soldiers to develop medical problems such as trench foot, a condition which Private Aubrey Davis suffered from.

The Anzac spirit is a concept that refers to the shared characteristics that Australian and New Zealand soldiers possess and demonstrated in the battlefields of World War I. These qualities include endurance, courage, ingenuity, good humour, larrikinism, and mateship. The Gallipoli Campaign is sometimes described as the moment of birth of the nationhood both of Australia and of New Zealand and the birth of ANZAC spirit. Aubrey demonstrated these qualities by fighting for our country despite the risk he took by enlisting which ultimately ended in his death.