

Commemoration of WW1 Veteran 3692 Private Francis John Davies and a Mudjimba RSL Sub Branch Poppy at the Western Front

This commemoration recognises the life and military service of **3692 Private Francis John Davies** (known as 'Frank') who was Killed in Action during the First Battle of Dernancourt, Albert, France on 28 March 1918.

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Published 22 July 2025

Frank is buried in an unknown grave in Dernancourt Military Cemetery Extension marked as **An Australian Soldier of the Great War, known unto God**. He is an uncle of Jan Dwan (nee Davies). Jan and her husband Terry travelled to Dernancourt on Frank's birthday 12 June 2025 to place a poppy and a memorial plaque on the grave of an unknown soldier.



The photo shows us at a grave that Jan walked to and said, "This is it". She was attracted by the roses. We were fortunate to meet a lovely Albert local, Gweinaëlle who drove us to the cemetery and became our photographer. Her first photo was taken in landscape and then, when she changed to portrait, Gweinaëlle found that the cross was almost perfectly centred in the image. It was meant to be!

We believe that, apart from his name being memorialised at the Australian War Memorial, Cenotaphs at Goodna and Redbank, and at Villers-Brettonneux in France, there had been no recognition of his life and his service, including not among his family.

Before telling the story of Frank's service and his time on the Western Front, it is appropriate to set the context of his life.

The Back Story

Frank was born 12 June 1898 at Rockhampton. His birth was registered to Archibald and Martha Stewart and the register records Martha's maiden name as Martha Ann Stephen Grubb. All other references to Martha's name read Martha Ann Grubb, from the passenger list of the ship on which she emigrated from Wiltshire, England to the birth registrations of her seven other children.

At the age of 18 months, Frank was adopted by Stephen Herbert Davies who was living at Redbank, a distance of 650km from Rockhampton. Stephen Herbert was 19 years of age and single. Both Stephen Herbert and his father Stephen Owen Davies were living in Rockhampton at the time Frank was conceived. We assessed evidence and concluded that either Stephen Herbert or Stephen Owen was Frank's father, with Martha adding Stephen to her name on the birth registration to acknowledge the biological father. Why else would a single 19 year male living so far away adopt a child?

Perhaps Martha's husband discovered that he was not Frank's biological father and ordered that Frank be removed from the household; and Martha contacted the biological father, leading to the adoption of Frank by Stephen Herbert.

Stephen Herbert married Henrietta D'Evlin in 1905 and they raised seven children of their own, along with Frank until he enlisted in 1917. The children of the marriage maintained close relationships throughout their lives, mostly living in the Goodna to Brisbane region and gathering together to celebrate family occasions. Strangely, though, Frank was never mentioned to the next generation and, to the best of our knowledge, his service was never recognised on Anzac Day. Nor was it said that the F.J. Davies inscribed on the Goodna and Redbank War Memorials was Francis John Davies, a member of the family.

It appears that Frank lived his whole life not knowing anything about his biological parents. This quote from Frank's military enlistment records dated 29 January 1917 is poignant:

"I was adopted by Mr Stephen (Herbert) Davies when I was eighteen months of age. Since that age I have never seen my parents and do not know their whereabouts."

In 2008, while we were preparing for a trip to discover and understand the World War 1 battlefields, Jan's 93 years old father (also Stephen Owen Davies) said:

"I have an adopted brother Frank who was killed in France during the First World War. He is buried in an unknown grave."

That is all that he told us. So, we started the research journey to give Frank the commemoration that he deserves.

We immediately obtained Frank's military service records from the National Archives, intently reading the 60 pages for any clues that might provide insight into his life. And we started a family research project. These efforts revealed the above story. Having established that a DNA line existed from Frank's father to living descendants and DNA soaked family artifacts, we wrote to the Unrecovered War Casualties section of the Defence Department hoping that a link might be established. UWC advised that it currently has no evidence that might lead to a family link.

So, with no likelihood of his name being inscribed on a headstone, we decided to travel to his burial cemetery and place a poppy supplied by the Mudjimba RSL Sub Branch and a plaque we designed on one of the 177 graves of unknown soldiers.



Deployment on the Western Front

HMAT A28 Miltiades set sail from Sydney on 2 August 1917 with reinforcements for the 47th Battalion; Private Francis John Davies deployed to the Western Front.

He disembarked at Glasgow, Scotland two months later and marched into 12th Tng Bn. Godford on 7 October 1917. On 5 December he was A.W.L. from 7PM parade and was charged as a "crime", forfeiting 1 day's pay.

On 18 January 1918 he proceeded from Southampton to France and was taken on strength of 47th Battalion A.I.F., 23 January 1918.

The next entry in his service record reads "KILLED IN ACTION. FRANCE 28/3/18". This was during the First Battle of Dernancourt.

The Australian War Memorial records the battle as follows:

"Dernancourt, a village on the River Ancre in France, was the scene of much desperate fighting during the German offensive of March and April 1918. The 12th and 13th Brigades first occupied positions around Dernancourt on 27 March. Elements of the 50th (Prussian) Reserve Division launched an attack on the morning of the 28th that was repulsed by the 12th Brigade, using the embankment of the Albert-Amiens railway line as a defensive barrier. This action, however, was only a precursor to a larger, more determined effort by the Division later in the day, mounted right along the Australians' thinly held front. Fighting continued until the early evening, but the Germans were eventually defeated, with approximately 550 casualties, and at a cost of 137 to the Australians."

Frank was initially buried near Sheet 62 D NE, Railway Line, Albert before being reinterred as an unknown soldier in the Military Cemetery Dernancourt Extension.

Page 29 of Frank's service records reveals that his possessions at the time of his death were a wallet, letters, photos, a card, 4 Coins and a Battalion Souvenir. They were despatched to his father on the "Barunga" in Case No 1172 on 21 June 1918, however the ship was sunk in an attack by the enemy and his effects were lost at sea.

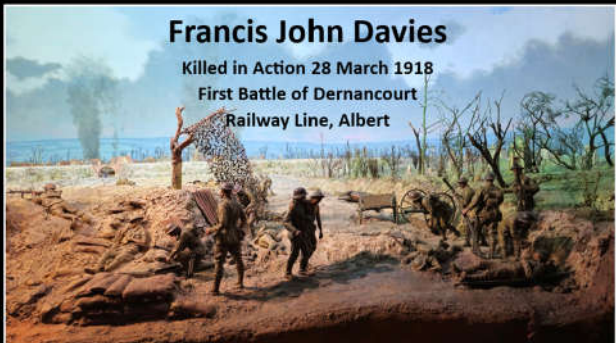
Page 23 records approval on 15 April 1931 that Frank's war medals be issued to his father, Stephen Herbert Davies; their current whereabouts is unknown.

Francis John Davies, Lest we forget

Front and back of plaque laid in commemoration


Francis John Davies

Killed in Action 28 March 1918
First Battle of Dernancourt
Railway Line, Albert




Battle of Dernancourt
Photograph of diorama at
Australian War Memorial, Canberra


Family




Stephen Owen DAVIES
1855 – 1936 (81 years)



Stephen Herbert DAVIES
1882 – 1939 (57 years)




Martha Ann Stephen GRUBB
MARRIED NAME
Martha Ann Stewart
1872 – 1951 (79 years)



Francis John DAVIES
1898 – 1918 (19 years)
I am now at rest, linked to my parents.

"I was adopted by Mr Stephen (Herbert) Davies when I was eighteen months of age. Since that age I have never seen my parents and do not know of their whereabouts."
Enlistment papers 29/1/1917



Commemorated on his birthday 12 June 2025 by his niece
Janice Rosalind DAVIES (Dwan) & her husband Terry
mobile: +61 419 674 927 terry@dwan.au

Francis John Davies





12/6/1898 Born at Rockhampton as Francis John Stewart to Martha Ann Stephen Grubb
MARRIED NAME Martha Ann Stewart

About 1900 Adopted by Stephen Herbert Davies
Name changed to Francis John Davies

29/1/1917 Enlisted Australian Commonwealth Military Forces,
Regimental Number 3692

2/8/1917 Embarked from Sydney HMAT A28 Miltiades
for the Western Front

26/1/1918 Private, 47th Battalion, 10th Reinforcement, AIF WW1

28/3/1918 Killed in Action at the Railway Line, Albert
during the First Battle of Dernancourt



Buried Military Cemetery
Dernancourt - no known grave

MEMORIALS:
Australian War Memorial, Canberra
Goodna & Redbank War Memorials
Villers-Bretonneux Memorial
Virtual War Memorial Australia at
<https://vwma.org.au/explore/people/263996>