**The biography of Private Gilbert Walter Davis**

**­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­**Located 100km from Adelaide sits the country town of Riverton. It was here that Private Gilbert Walter Davis, World War One Military Medal recipient, was born and raised.

Born in 1892, in his early life he was a regular country boy, attending Riverton Primary School. He would become a farm labourer, working for his father’s business, a hay merchant, based in Riverton. The business provided hay to local livestock and was a steady stream of income for the family. In his life before the war, he was recognised as being a notable football player for Riverton. He played for the local football league and played against other small towns in the area. He was a star player.

The 24-year-old Gilbert Walter Davis enlisted to join the Great War on the 22nd of January 1916, only just over one year after the war had begun. The battle of Gallipoli had already come to its conclusion. He was destined for one place: France. The Western Front, the trenches. On the 11th of April, he left Australian soil for the first time and the last time, aboard the HMAT Aeneas (A60), a soldier transport ship, with a capacity of 1,800. Like every Australian soldier before him, he would disembark at the Suez, Egypt. Training from there took over two months. The camp was located at the famous Pyramids of Giza. The hot dry conditions of the desert would have not been like home. Riverton was more lush and received more rainfall for it to be anything like what he was used to experiencing.

Finally, after months of rigorous training he left Egypt on the 29th of July. The journey by sea would take Gilbert to Great Britain. He would then spend yet another two months training in England. Eventually, after all his training, he would finally put it to good use.

Now came the real event, France. He would join the 10th Battalion in the field on the 19th of September 1916. Now a Private, Gilbert would become a model soldier, disregarding his own life to help the wounded, a stretcher bearer. His climax would come fighting in the Third Battle of Ypres.

The Third Battle of Ypres was one of the major battles the AIF fought. It was an allied offensive beginning on the 31st of July 1917. Located in Belgium, it had been the site of previous major offensives by the German army. The objective was a breakthrough on the Western Front. Progress was very slow, with the allies failing to make any substantial breakthroughs. The battle would produce some 310,000 allied causalities, of which David Gilbert Walter made up one.

He was on the front lines; opposing the Germans, working around the ‘Polygon Woods’, he would make multiple trips under heavy German shell fire to rescue the wounded. Stretcher bearing was a risky endeavour. He would venture into no-man’s land to rescue those who had fallen to German fire. For a time he was lucky, making several trips under heavy German fire and not even being injured once, according to records

But unfortunately, his luck would run out. On the 8th of October 1917, he conducted his last mission. There were no accounts to how he fell, nobody was with him at the time, he just never came back to the trenches, trapped in Europe forever. His body was buried in a mass grave in Belgium, unmarked. For his bravery in the field, he was awarded the Military Medal on the 31st of October 1917, but he died before he would ever receive it. He had died a full year before the guns on the Western Front would fall silent. Just another soldier among many who lost his life.

The sad news was broken in The Adelaide Chronicle newspaper in Australia in November 1917. His parents were heartbroken. They wrote many letters to the War Office to ask about his death, but they never received anything of substance back. His kit would eventually find its way home in May of 1918, but his Military Medal did not. A new one was provided after the War. His death left a hole in Riverton, never to be filled, but his name is proudly displayed on the town’s war memorial.

Gilbert Walter Davis showed himself to be a model soldier in the war. He truly showed the spirit of the ANZACs. He demonstrated bravery under fire, venturing into the deadly zone of no-man’s land to rescue those who had fallen to German fire. This was truly showing his mateship, he was thinking of others before himself. It was decided that he so showed these aspects of being an ANZAC that he deserved the Military Medal. His medal has only been awarded to 11,000 Australian soldiers ever over its 80-year lifespan.