

## **Albert William DAVIS**

Born Dawlish, 24<sup>th</sup> August 1887  
Private 443539

Died of wounds 7<sup>th</sup> December 1917, aged 30  
Canadian Infantry, 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion

**Albert William Davis** was a Dawlish lad who lost his parents by his early twenties and then emigrated to Canada. Whatever might have been his dreams of a life there, they were rudely shattered by the start of the Great War and he returned to Europe to fight with Canadian forces.

**Albert's** grandfather, William Cummins Davis (1815-1894) was a Town Porter and married Martha Butler (1819-1890). They had five children by the census of 1861: William (1846-), Joseph (Albert's father)(1850-1899), Mary (1853-), Martha (1857-) and Elizabeth (1860-).

By the 1871 census they were living at 14 Park Street and Joseph was 21 and a carpenter. His younger sisters were dressmakers. In 1877 Joseph Benjamin Davis married Ann Bessie Lovell in Dawlish (GRO ref Newton Abbot district, 1877 Apr-Jun, vol 5b, page 207) and he took work as a Railway Porter. In 1881 they were living in Manor Row with their first two children, Ida Mary (1879-) and Kathleen B (1880-). They had five children in all but three died and the two survivors (by 1911 census) were Ida Mary and **Albert William Davis**. Their father, Joseph, died in 1899 (GRO 1899 Apr-Jun, N.A., vol 5b, p 67). Their widowed mother was living with these two children at 11 Luscombe Terrace in 1901. She died in 1911 in 11 Regent Street, soon after the taking of the census.

Ida Mary Davis married Hedley Hoar in 1908 (GRO 1908, N.A., July-Sep, vol 5b, p 287) and she was **Albert's** closest living relative when he decided to emigrate in 1913.

There is a record that **Albert Davis**, aged 26, arrived in Quebec City in September 1913 aboard the ship *Royal Edward*.

Following the outbreak of war **Albert William Davis** enlisted with the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the Canadian Expeditionary Force on 9<sup>th</sup> June 1915. The Western Times of Tuesday 11 December 1917 reported that "after many rejections, on account of weak sight, he was accepted." He was medically examined at Nelson, British Columbia, which lies between Vancouver and Calgary and one imagines that he had set about a new life in Western Canada.

"Earlier contingents, including the 2<sup>nd</sup> Division which contained the **29<sup>th</sup> Infantry Battalion** of the Canadian Expeditionary Force, had sailed for England and been trained on Salisbury Plain and at Shorncliffe before leaving for the front. Just after New Year's Day, 1916, the Canadian Corps was strengthened by the addition of the Third Division, the formation of which had been authorized the preceding December."

"The fighting of the year 1916 was among the bitterest of the whole war. The first heavy fighting in which the Canadians were engaged was in April around the craters at St. Eloi, at the southern end of the Ypres salient. This sector had been much fought over. Huge underground mines had been detonated; the ground had been churned up by shell-fire; and the rains had made it a veritable quagmire. On April 2<sup>nd</sup> the Third British Division had established themselves on a line well within the former German defenses. The next day they were relieved by the Second Canadian Division. The position which the Canadians took up was not consolidated; and the next day before any consolidation could be carried out, the German counterattack began with the most severe bombardment yet seen in that section of front.

The Canadian advance posts were overwhelmed, and nearly all the gains of the British were surrendered. For over a week the Canadians strove repeatedly to recover the lost ground, but in the end they had to give up the attempt as impossible, and to dig in on the line from which the British had set out.

The arrival in France of the Fourth Canadian Division in August, 1916, brought the Canadian Corps up to what was to become its full strength. At this date the first battle of the Somme had been raging since July 1st. While the Canadian Corps had no part in the early stages of this battle the Newfoundland Regiment which was part of the British Army had been annihilated on July 1st at Beaumont Hamel. It was not however until the beginning of September that the Canadian Corps was moved down to the battle area; and not until the middle of September was the Corps engaged in any serious action.

From the middle of September, however, to the middle of November the Corps bore its full share of the Somme fighting. The first important action in which the Canadians were engaged was the capture of Sugar and Candy trench and the sugar refinery at Courcellette on September 15. This action is notable not only for the fierce fighting involved but by the fact that for the first time tanks were used in cooperation with the Canadian infantry. The following day the Canadians swept on and captured the village of Courcellette itself, in one of the most successful operations of the Somme fighting. For many days the Germans strove stubbornly to retake Courcellette; but their efforts resulted only in further loss of ground and further punishment.

At a later stage of the Somme fighting, known as the battle of Thiepval Ridge, the Canadians suffered heavy losses in the taking of Regina Trench. This was a line of German defences beyond Courcellette which it took the Corps a full month to capture. As the Autumn had advanced, the weather had turned bad, and the heavy Somme mud had made the problem of the attacking troops heartbreakingly difficult. Nevertheless, in the end they succeeded in capturing Desire Trench, which was the German support line, However when the Somme fighting stopped in the later part of November there was little to celebrate. The Canadian Corps had sustained 29,029 casualties for a mere six kilometers of mud.

The end of 1916 found the Canadian Corps finally fashioned into the army which during 1917 and 1918 was to be the spear-head of many attacks. It had now attained the strength of four divisions; and in the fighting about Courcellette, Regina and Desire Trenches the men of these four divisions and their commanding officers had gained valuable experience, experience that would serve them well in their next battle Vimy Ridge. The growth and development of the Canadian Corps was now complete.

It appears that **Albert Davis** may have been seriously injured by shrapnel in an air raid later in 1917 and was brought back to Netley Hospital near Southampton, where he died. The following extract from the

The Western Times of Tuesday 11 December 1917 reported:

'News reached Dawlish yesterday that Pte. Bert Davis (Canadian) had passed away at the Welsh Hospital, Netley. About three weeks ago his sister, Mrs Hedley Hoar, received official notification that he was gassed and injured in the spine with shrapnel. Up to Thursday last, he was reported to be making excellent progress, and the news of his death came as a great shock to his relatives. He was in Canada when war broke out, and, after many rejections, on account of weak sight, was accepted. He threw up a good

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berth, with excellent prospects. Before leaving Dawlish he was one of the most popular lads in the town. As an entertainer his services were greatly in demand for "smokers" and entertainments. His death will be keenly felt by Dawlish people who tender full sympathy to Mrs Hoar in her grief.'

There are further contemporary news items, including one of his funeral, in the 'Documents' section of this page.

**Davis A W** is recorded on the Devon Roll of Honour and on that of the Dawlish Boys' School. He is listed in the Book of Remembrance – First World War – in the Memorial Chamber of the Peace Tower in Ottawa.

Dawlish War memorial inscription: DAVIS A.W. PTE. 29TH CAN.

Devon Heritage site info: 443539 Private Albert William Davis of the 29<sup>th</sup> Battalion, the Canadian Infantry (British Columbia Regiment). Son of Joseph and Bessie Davis of Dawlish, England. Born in Dawlish 24 August 1877. Died 7 December 1917, aged 30. Buried in Dawlish Cemetery.

Commonwealth War Graves entry: DAVIS, ALBERT WILLIAM Private 443539  
07/12/1917 Age: 30 Canadian Infantry, 29th Bn.  
Grave Ref: 3013. [Dawlish Cemetery](#)  
Son of Joseph and Bessie Davis, of Dawlish, Devon, England.

Last known address: Canada

Next of kin: Ida Mary Hoar, formerly Davis

### References:

Free birth, marriage & death refs.

British Newspaper Archive

Soldiers of the First World War, Canadian Government records

Dawlish Gazette 8<sup>th</sup> December and 15<sup>th</sup> December 1917

A Brief History of the Canadian Expeditionary Force -

[www.niagarahistorical.museum/media/03.C.E.F.-ABriefHistorycopy.pdf](http://www.niagarahistorical.museum/media/03.C.E.F.-ABriefHistorycopy.pdf)

Refs via subscription websites:

Census extracts

Marriage refs