



In Memory of  
**Corporal**  
**RICHARD JAMES UNDERWOOD**  
2391, 2<sup>nd</sup> Australian Light Horse  
who died age 24  
on 20<sup>TH</sup> January 1917

Son of Richard James and Rosa Underwood, of St. George, Queensland.

Remembered with honour  
KANTARA WAR MEMORIAL CEMETERY, EGYPT



LANCE CORPORAL  
**RICHARD JAMES UNDERWOOD**  
2<sup>ND</sup> AUSTRALIAN LIGHT HORSE  
SERVICE NO: 2391



AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

P03452.011

Many of the light horsemen came from the pastoral properties of the vast Australian interior. They had literally been riding since they could walk. Their association with towns like Toowoomba often came through their school years. Such was the case of **Richard James Underwood**. He was born at St. George, about 400 kilometres west of Toowoomba, and grew up on the family property "Warroo" Station between Surat and St. George. He was the son of Richard James (senior) and Rosa Underwood, and was educated at the Toowoomba Grammar School.

Richard travelled to Brisbane to enlist in the Light Horse at Chermside. He was a member of the COE, 5'9" tall and weighed 140 pounds. He had a fair complexion, blue eyes and brown hair and stated his age as 18 years and 4 months when he enlisted on 27 October 1915. However, after the war his mother Rosa indicated in a letter to the army that he was born in July 1898. This suggests he put his age up by a year to enlist, not an unusual occurrence in the Great War.

Richard's career in the light horse was reasonably straightforward. He signed up as the Gallipoli campaign was in its final phase, two months before the Evacuation. The 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Horse Regiment was about to re-group in Egypt for the campaign by the British to secure the Suez Canal from Turkish threats and then attack along the coast through Sinai and Palestine to defeat the Ottoman Empire. Richard sailed from Sydney with the 16/2<sup>nd</sup> Reinforcements on 31 March 1916 aboard A16 *Star of Victoria*. He landed in Egypt and continued training with the 1<sup>st</sup> L.H. Brigade Training Regiment. He was taken on strength by the 2<sup>nd</sup> LHR at Tel-el-Kebir, and soon after moved into Sinai to join his comrades at Romani.

In August 1916 the Turks launched an offensive to take Romani, a town near the Mediterranean, east of the Canal. Richard survived days of intense fighting that successfully stalled the Turks; he had participated in one of the major fights of the Light Horse in the war. In the months that followed, the Allies continued pushing east towards Gaza and Palestine. There were several battles along the way.

In January 1917 the mounted troops (British, New Zealanders and Australians) came to Rafa, about 25 miles from Gaza. They attacked on 9 January, encircling a Turkish garrison in difficult country dominated by sand-hills. The attack went forward slowly against stiff opposition, but after a day's intense fighting succeeded in securing the town. During the day Richard Underwood was wounded in action. He was evacuated to the 24<sup>th</sup> Stationary Hospital in the Canal Zone, with wounds described as "GSW head, groin, leg". He reached the hospital on 11 January. Telegrams were sent to his mother about four days later, culminating in one on 23 January stating: **NOW REPORTED SON LANCE CORPORAL RICHARD J UNDERWOOD STILL DANGEROUSLY ILL WILL FURNISH FURTHER PROGRESS REPORT WHEN RECEIVED BASE RECORDS.**

However, Richard had already died of his wounds on 20 January. He was buried at the Kantara War Cemetery (grave D.26) in a ceremony conducted by Rev. J.D.W. Hayton. There is evidence that his parents grieved deeply for their son who died before his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday. In the early 1920s the army received no response to its letters offering the commemorative plaque and scroll to NOK. It took Rosa almost a year to write back to the army, using an address at Phillip Street, Toowoomba, as well as "Warroo", in which she indicated that Richard's

father was now dead. There were many cases of families that seemed to suffer continuous blows after the loss of their sons at the front. In February 1923 Rosa received the official mementoes and her son's medals.

Toowoomba Grammar School Archive Records State that he started school on 1st April 1915 and left the school on 1<sup>st</sup> June 1915. He played Rugby in the 1<sup>st</sup> XV in 1915. The School Magazine of May 1917 stated, *'Richard Underwood, son of Mrs. Underwood. of Warroo, Surat-Entered School January, 1915 and left to enlist in June that year. Was in the football XV. Corporal of 2<sup>nd</sup> Light Horse. Severely wounded in the battle of Rafa and died three days later, January 19th, 1917. Age, 19 years.'*

**External Links:**

[CWGC](#)

[AWM4 AIF unit war diaries 10/2/25 2ND LHR JAN 1917](#)

[Australian War Memorial Honour Roll](#)

[Australian National Archives Military Record](#)