

Elmer Ray Davis (1888 - 1928)

Elmer Ray Davis was born in Bement, Illinois, on October 6, 1888, to Oscar and Katherine (Trout) Davis. He was the oldest of six children, with two older sisters, Anna and Nettie, and two younger brothers, George and Charles. One of his siblings died as a baby. His parents married in 1887 in Macon County, Illinois. The family lived in different places, including Bement and Urbana, before settling in Bloomington in 1902, when Elmer was about 13 years old.

Records about Elmer's early years are a bit unclear, but we can learn about his family from city directories. In 1905, Elmer's uncle Alfred worked as a lineman for the Kinloch-Bloomington Telephone Company. Elmer's sister Anna worked at a laundry, and his brother George worked as a waiter. Elmer's first job was in 1907 at a meat market. By 1909, Elmer worked as a driver and then as a general laborer. He married his first wife, Dorothy M., in 1910.

In 1917, when the U.S. entered World War I, Elmer was living in Battle Creek, Michigan, and working as a lineman for the Michigan Telephone Company. He registered for the draft and was soon called to serve. Elmer served in the 85th Division as a Private at Camp Merritt, New Jersey, where he trained at the School for Bakers and Cooks. He may have helped feed the troops who passed through the camp on their way to France.

There are some stories suggesting Elmer served in Company K of the 339th Infantry, a unit of the 85th Division that went to Russia in 1918. The 339th, known as the "Polar Bears," helped fight Bolshevik revolutionaries after the war had ended. After his service, Elmer returned to Michigan and worked as a lineman again. In 1920, he married his second wife, Grace Cain, but their marriage didn't last, and Elmer eventually moved back to Bloomington in 1926. He married his third wife, Anna Bell, in 1926, and they lived in several different homes in Bloomington.

Elmer worked as a laborer until he died on August 3, 1928, after being kicked by a horse. He developed a deadly infection called tetanus, or "lockjaw," from the injury. Despite treatment at the hospital, he passed away. Elmer was buried in Evergreen Memorial Cemetery, and his funeral was attended by family and friends.

Elmer's headstone has a Star of David, even though there's no evidence his family was Jewish. He is remembered as a World War I veteran. His wife, Anna Bell, remarried in 1929, and they are both buried next to Elmer.