

## William Sutton Lewis War Record 1915-1919

At the outbreak of the First World War William had been married to Jessie less than two years<sup>1</sup>, and their first son Eric was around a year old<sup>1:2</sup>. So it is perhaps not surprising William, even though he had previously served in the Territorial Force of the Hampshire Yeomanry (Carabiniers)<sup>3:4</sup>, didn't volunteer and enlist for the army straight away.



**Figure 1:** William Lewis with Jessie nee Smart, St Margarets Hospital Margate

By 1915 the flow of volunteer recruits was dwindling. The government, undecided whether to introduce compulsory military service, tried a half-way house scheme. Lord Derby introduced a programme often called the Derby Scheme although its official title was the Group Scheme. Men aged 18 to 40 were informed that under the scheme they could continue to enlist voluntarily or attest with an obligation to come if called up later on. Married men, like William, had an added incentive in that they were advised they would be called up only once the supply of single men was exhausted. The scheme was originally intended to run only from 16th October 1915 to 30th November 1915, this was later extended to midnight of 11-12th December 1915.<sup>5</sup>

It is on the 11th December 1915 that William attested<sup>3</sup>, for which he would have been paid a day's army pay for the day and given a grey armband with a red crown as a sign that he had so volunteered.<sup>5</sup> Having been officially transferred into the Army Reserve, William was sent back to his home and job until he was called up. Interestingly, he may not have been sent far, as his job is given as Officers Mess Steward.<sup>3</sup>

Some of the younger single men who attested in December 1915 were called up the following month in January 1916,<sup>5</sup> but it would be a little while before William was called up because he was married and close to the upper age limit for enlistment of 40 years old.

There is some uncertainty to William's date of birth. His birth certificate records it as being 23 September 1879.<sup>6</sup> However, we know William's father was a coachman<sup>7</sup> and the story passed down is that he couldn't get into town to register the birth within the period legally required, so he adjusted the date of birth.<sup>8</sup> A family record by William himself, records his birth as 30 August 1879.<sup>9</sup> In 1915 when William attested, his age is given as 37 and 192 days, which suggests a birth date of 2nd June 1878, though separately on the same form his birthdate is given as 30 August 1878.<sup>3</sup>

William continued to work as an Officers Mess Steward,<sup>10</sup> later becoming a Catering Superintendent in "Group 40(M)".<sup>11</sup> Despite their uncertain future, William and Jessie had another son, Gordon, on 8th June 1916<sup>1:12</sup>. It was less than a year before William was called up to enlist on the 12th February 1917, initially joining the 2/8th Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment, Regiment Number 242947<sup>3</sup>.

William's medical examination describes him as 5ft 11 1/4 inches, 189lb, with a 40 inch chest and despite requiring some dental treatment, gives him the category B1 - "free from serious organic diseases, able to stand service on lines of communication in France, or in garrisons in the tropics, able to march 5 miles, see to shoot with glasses, and hear well."<sup>10:13</sup> According to his son Eric, it was due to his size that William was chosen to be a Lewis Gunner.<sup>11:14</sup>

On combat operations four or five men were often deployed in the Lewis gun team. The Number 1 fired the gun, the No. 2. changed the magazine, whilst the Nos. 3, 4 and 5 carried the spare magazines in special canvas transportation bags and offered protection to the firing team with their rifles and hand-grenades. Eventually, such became the importance of the Lewis gun teams, that many infantrymen were trained to undertake any of the roles and all the Lewis gun team participated in the rather tedious task of recharging the empty magazines.<sup>15</sup>



**Figure 2:** Lewis Gun Team, near Colincamps on Somme, 1918

William would have initially undergone basic military training including physical fitness, drill, march discipline and essential field craft, before

specialising as a machine gunner. As he approached active service he would have received other basic training in first aid, gas defense and wiring.<sup>5</sup>

It seems his training was intermittent as, though the records are difficult to read, William appears to have been admitted to hospital several times. The day after enlisting William was admitted into hospital for three weeks, and then three months later on 17th May 1917 re-admitted to hospital, in Canterbury, with Tonsillitis. From Canterbury he was transferred to Herne Bay Military Hospital where he stayed until 13th July (or perhaps June) 1917.<sup>10</sup>

Despite the sporadic training, on the 13th September 1917, William embarked a ship in Folkestone with the 8th Bn. Middx Regt and disembarked in Boulogne.<sup>11</sup>

Shortly after arriving in France, on 16th Sept 1917, William was transferred to the 8th Battalion of the Kings Own Royal Lancasters.<sup>11</sup> This was the same day that the battalion entered the Third battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele which would last until 10th November 1917. William's battalion are recorded as being involved in the attack on Polygon Wood between the 6th-28th September 1917.<sup>16</sup>

For the soldiers who fought at Passchendaele, it was known as the 'Battle of Mud'. The area was saturated with the heaviest rain the region had seen in thirty years. The area in Flanders became effectively a swamp. Tanks, sent forward to help the infantry, simply got stuck. Infantry soldiers found movement very difficult. The impact of the artillery bombardment had destroyed the drainage systems of the region which greatly added to the problem. The shell craters made by the Allied shelling filled with water and did not allow advancing men the opportunity to hide in them. The fields through which men should have gone became impassable.<sup>17</sup>

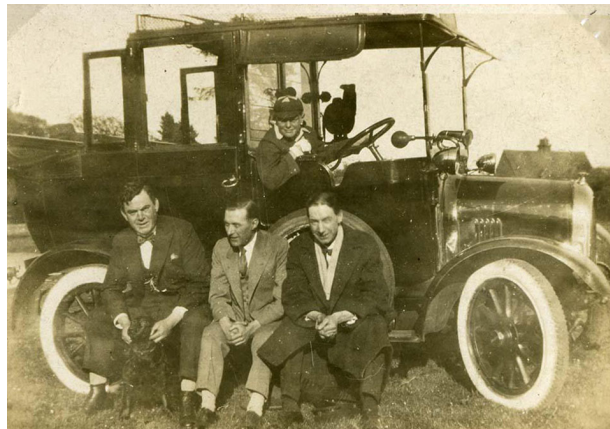


**Figure 3:** Passchendaele, November 1917

On the 12th December 1917 William was diagnosed with Pyrexia of Unknown Origin (PUO), and was transferred, first on the 14th December within France, and then on the 20th December back to the UK on the Hospital Ship Panama.<sup>11</sup> Back home, William stayed in the East Leeds War Hospital, Harehills Road, Leeds from 22nd December 1917 until 1st April 1918 suffering from “Trench Fever”.<sup>10</sup>

Trench fever is a moderately serious disease transmitted by body lice. The onset of symptoms was usually sudden with severe headache, pains in the muscles of trunk and leg and characteristic shin pains. The fever was exceedingly variable, but commonly lasted for about five days, (sometimes the illness was called "Five Day Fever"). The fever was followed by a remission and then a recurrence after 5-6 days. These recurrences were single or multiple and up to 12 recurrences every 5 or 6 days were not uncommon. This resulted in a prolonged disability. Very little could be done for the sufferers except admission to hospital for nursing care. Although few men, if any, died from the disease, 80% of infected men remained unfit for duty for up to three months.<sup>18</sup>

There is no further record of William returning to France and on 21st February 1919 William was moved to dispersal from Walton-on-Naze, and shortly afterwards, on 28th March 1919, was transferred to Class Z Army reserve on Demobilization.<sup>11:19</sup> Throughout the war William served as a Private<sup>1:4:20</sup> and he was subsequently awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal.<sup>1</sup>



**Figure 4:** William Lewis with dog, Eric at steering wheel, 1926

War 1865-1972  
Army Form B. 2519  
948

(For the Duration of the War, with the Colours and in the Army Reserve).

**SHORT SERVICE.**

**ATTESTATION OF**

No. **30603** Name William Sutton Lewis Corps 4th Middlesex Rgt

Card No. 1301

Questions to be put to the Recruit before Enlistment.

1. What is your Name? ... William Sutton Lewis
2. What is your full Address? ... 51 St Stephens Avenue  
Sheffield
3. Are you a British Subject? ... Yes
4. What is your Age? ... 37 Years 192 Months
5. What is your Trade or Calling? ... Officer Mrs Stewart
6. Are you Married? ... Yes
7. Have you ever served in any branch of His Majesty's Forces, naval or military, if so, which? ... South Carolina Infantry 37 years
8. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vaccinated? ... Yes
9. Are you willing to be enlisted for General Service? ... Yes
10. Did you receive a Notice, and do you understand its meaning, and who gave it to you? ... Yes Name W. A. ... Corps ...
11. Are you willing to serve upon the following conditions provided His Majesty should so long require your services?  
For the duration of the War, at the end of which you will be discharged with all convenient speed. You will be required to serve for one day with the Colours and the remainder of the period in the Army Reserve, in accordance with the provisions of the Royal Warrant dated 20th Oct., 1913, until such time as you may be called up by order of the Army Council. If employed with Hospitals, depots of Mounted Units, or as a Clerk, etc., you may be retained after the termination of hostilities until your services can be spared, but such retention shall in no case exceed six months. ... Yes

I, William Sutton Lewis do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me to the above questions are true, and that I am willing to fulfil the engagements made.

William Sutton Lewis SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT.  
John ... Signature of Witness.

**OATH TO BE TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.**

I, William Sutton Lewis swear by Almighty God, that I will be faithful and bear true Allegiance to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs, and Successors, and that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crown, and Dignity against all enemies, and will observe and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of the Generals and Officers set over me. So help me God.

**CERTIFICATE OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER.**

The Recruit above named was cautioned by me that if he made any false answer to any of the above questions he would be liable to be punished as provided in the Army Act.

The above questions were then read to the Recruit in my presence.

I have taken care that he understands each question; and that his answer to each question has been duly entered as applied to, and the said Recruit has made and signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at ... this 11th day of Dec 1915

... Signature of the Justice

† Certificate of Approving Officer.

I certify that this Attestation of the above-named Recruit is correct, and properly filled up, and that the required appear to have been complied with. I accordingly approve, and appoint him to the 4th Middlesex Rgt (or other authority for the enlistment) will be attached to the Attestation.

... Approving Officer.  
... Capt.

† The signature of the Approving Officer is to be affixed in the presence of the Recruit.  
‡ Here insert the "Corps" for which the Recruit has been enlisted.

§ The particulars of his former service, and to produce, if possible, his Certificate of Discharge and Certificate of Character conspicuously endorsed in red ink, as follows, viz.—(Name) \_\_\_\_\_ (Date) \_\_\_\_\_

Figure 5: Attestation of William Sutton Lewis, 11th December 1915



Army Form B. 103. **Casualty Form - Active Service.** Regimental Number *21116*

Rank *1st Lt* Surname *Sutton Lewis* Christian Name *William Sutton Lewis*

Religion *C.S.* Age on Enlistment *27* years *9* months

Enlisted (a) *12.2.17* Terms of Service (a) *10 Yrs* Service reckons from (a) *12.2.17*

Date of promotion to present rank ..... Date of appointment to lance rank .....

Extended (a) ..... Re-engaged (a) ..... Qualification (b) *1st Lt*

Occupation *Medical Officer* or Corps Trade and Rate .....

Signature of Officer. *[Signature]*

Date	Report	From whom received	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, &c. during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 103, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place of Casualty	Date of Casualty	Remarks Taken from Army Form B. 103, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents.
			<i>8th Bn. Middx Regt</i>	Embarked ... Folkestone	<i>13 SEP 1917</i>	
				Disembarked... Boulogne	<i>13 SEP 1917</i>	
			<b>Transferred to KINGS OWN ROYAL LANCASTERS</b>			
			<b>&amp; Posted to. 8th BATT 18 9th A.O. 204 &amp; A.C.I. 1492 of 1916.</b>			
			<i>D. C. Batta</i>	Joined Batta.	<i>18 SEP 1917</i>	
			<i>1st Lt</i>		<i>12.12.17</i>	<i>1st Lt</i>
			<i>1st Lt</i>		<i>12.12.17</i>	<i>1st Lt</i>
			<i>To U.K. per H.S. for leave</i>		<i>20.12.17</i>	<i>1st Lt</i>

(a) In the case of a man who has re-engaged for, or enlisted into Section D, Army Reserve, particulars of such re-engagement or enlistment will be entered.  
 (b) Signaller, Shoeing-Smith, &c. W. 1184-M1188 1000 1/17/17 S P & Co. Ltd. Forms B. 103/4 B. 104. P.T.O.

Figure 6: Casualty Form (Record of Service) of William Sutton Lewis, pg 1

Date	Report	From whom received	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, &c. during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 103, Army Form A. 36, or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place of Casualty	Date of Casualty	Remarks Taken from Army Form B. 103, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents.
<i>20.4.19</i>		<i>O.B. Unit</i>	<i>The King's Own Regiment</i>	<i>India</i>	<i>27.2.19</i>	<i>1st Lt</i>

Figure 7: Casualty Form (Record of Service) of William Sutton Lewis, pg 2

A

Army Form B. 178<sup>A</sup>

To be used (a) for recruits enlisting direct into the Regular Army, and (b) for men of the Territorial Force when they are admitted to Hospital. Army Form B. 178<sup>A</sup> to be used for Special Reserve recruits and Special Reservists enlisting into the Regular Army.

### MEDICAL HISTORY of

Surname Lewis Christian Name William Sutton

TABLE I.—General Table.		TABLE III.—Boards; Courts of Enquiry, Vaccination, Inoculations, etc.; Examinations for Field or Foreign Service, Extension, Re-engagement, or Prolongation of Service; Issue of Surgical Appliances; Particulars of Dental Treatment, etc.	
Birthplace { Parish <u>Fasham</u> County <u>Hants</u>	Examined { on <u>5</u> day of <u>August</u> 101 <u>6</u> at <u>Hammermith</u>	Date	Brief detail, and Signature
Declared Age <u>37</u> years <u>195</u> days	Trade or Occupation <u>Officers Mess Sentries</u>	<u>28/4/17</u> <u>TAB</u> <u>JSH</u>	<u>3/5/17</u> <u>2</u>
Height <u>5</u> feet <u>11 3/4</u> inches	Weight <u>189</u> lbs.	<u>7-7-17</u> <u>Vacc</u>	
Chest Measurement { Girth when fully Expanded <u>40</u> inches Range of Expansion <u>3</u> inches	Physical Development <u>Good</u>	Examined by No. 4. T. M. B. <b>DOVER COURT 8 AUG 1917</b>	
Vaccination Marks { ARM RIGHT LEFT Number <u>3</u>	When Vaccinated <u>Infancy</u>	Category <u>B (One)</u> <u>James Duncanson</u> LT. COL. R.A.M.G. PRESIDENT NO. 4. T.M.B.	
When Vaccinated { R.E.-V- <u>6</u> L.E.-V- <u>6</u>	Remarks indicating congenital peculiarities or previous disease	<div style="font-size: 4em; font-weight: bold;">S</div>	
(b) Slight defects but not sufficient to cause rejection— <u>Dental Treatment</u> <u>Functional Bursit</u>			
Approved by <u>R. Blakiston</u> Rank _____ Medical Officer.	President, Recruiting Medical Board.		
Enlisted { at <u>WEST LONDON</u> on <u>12 FEB 1917</u>	TABLE IV.—Service Table.		
Corps <u>LANCASTER R</u> Regtl. No. <u>30603</u>	Station or Troopship	Date of arrival or embarkation	Date of departure or disembarkation
Effective by _____			
day of _____ 101 _____			

[P.T.O.]

Figure 8: Medical History of William Lewis, pg 1

Date	Report From whom received	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form 1212, Army Form A. 36 or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place of Casualty	Date of Casualty	Remarks Taken from Army Form 1212, Army Form A. 36 or other official documents.
20 4 19	O. B. Hunt	The King's Own Rifles	Hospital	1900	K.C.

Figure 9: Medical History of William Lewis, pg 2



11<sup>th</sup> Thornfield Rd.  
Shepherds Bush  
W.12.  
15/12/20

Dear Sir

Re your letter of the  
19<sup>th</sup> inst. inquiring into  
my previous service in  
the Hants Carabineers  
I enclose please find my  
discharge, which I  
consider the easiest way  
out of the matter.

Thanking you for return  
of same I remain Sir  
Yours faithfully  
William S Lewis

late 30603 N.C.P. Coy.

The  
Thornfield  
Shepherds Bush

INFANTRY RECORDS  
No. 1  
27 OCT 1920  
FULLWOOD BARRACKS  
PRESTON

Figure 10: William Lewis correspondence, Oct 1920, to the Infantry Records regarding his service prior to the Great War in the Hants. Carabiniers Yeomanry

## Sources

- [1] Descriptive Report on Enlistment: 1917 William Sutton Lewis. 2/8 Middlesex Rgt, No 242947; Kings Own Royal Lancaster Rt, No 30603.
- [2] BC Eric Thomas Sutton Lewis 1913. Edgbaston, King's Norton District Register Office. Penciled note in top right hand corner "L140/4".
- [3] Attestation Form, Short Service: 1915 William Sutton Lewis. 2/8 Middlesex Rgt, No 242947; Kings Own Royal Lancaster Rt, No 30603. Two records exist, near identical but with different card numbers.
- [4] Correspondance, Wililam Sutton Lewis to Infantry Records, Oct 1920. 2/8 Middlesex Rgt, No 242947; Kings Own Royal Lancaster Rt, No 30603.
- [5] Chris Baker, Milverton Associates Ltd. The Long Long Trail, The British Army in the Great War of 1914-1918. Published at <http://www.1914-1918.net/>, 1995-2013. Extracted December 2013.
- [6] BC William Sutton Lewis 1879. Fareham District Register Office. [Number on back] "38496031".
- [7] Census 1871 Lewis George; Hackney, Middlesex RG11-1168-81-1.
- [8] Person: Eric Thomas Sutton Lewis. As recorded by Jonathan Eric Hayward Perry.
- [9] Family Tree by William Sutton Lewis.
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- [20] W 5132 Decoration postcard: 1922 William Sutton Lewis. 2/8 Middlesex Rgt, No 242947; Kings Own Royal Lancaster Rt, No 30603.