

Lance Corporal William George Hilsden

Regimental number: 492883

13th Battalion, London Regiment

born: 1883 - died: 1918

Lance Corporal William George Hilsden was born on 18 July 1883, in Kentish Town, London.¹ He was the first child of William Day and Annie Hilsden, who were married on 16 December 1882, in Islington.² William Day Hilsden, born in 1858, was a traveller in the mineral water trade.³ Annie, née Jardine, was born in Hackney, London, in 1860.⁴ William Day and Annie had seven children, of whom two, Percy and Florence, died in infancy.⁵ The other children who survived to adulthood were George Frederick, Cecil Alfred, Grace Olive, and Leslie Charles.⁶

In 1901, according to the census, William George's father had died,⁷ and William George was working as a tailor's clerk, living with his widowed mother and his four surviving siblings, still in Kentish Town.⁸ In July 1904 he married Ellen Edith Humphreys, a tailor's daughter known as Nellie, who was already working as a tailoress at age 16.⁹ Their first attempts at a family did not go well: their first child, William Charles, was born and died in the third quarter of 1904,¹⁰ and their second, William Richard, suffered the same fate a year later.¹¹ Their third son, Leslie Henry, was born in 1909 and grew up to be a well-known musician and band leader.¹² They also had a daughter, Rosetta Eleanor, born in 1913, but she did not make it to her sixth birthday, dying a few months after the end of the Great War.¹³

During the First World War, William George enlisted in the 13th Battalion of the London Regiment.¹⁴ His regimental number indicates he may have enlisted between November 1915 and August 1916.¹⁵ The 13th Battalion was stationed in France for most of the war, and fought at the Somme, Arras, and Passchendaele, among other actions.¹⁶ The only known reference to William George before his death is in the records of No. 2 General Hospital, located at the time in Le Havre, which document his nine-day stay to treat a contusion of the ankle in July 1917.¹⁷ At this time he was listed as a corporal (probably acting, as later documents still give his rank as lance corporal), and had completed one year of service, but just three weeks with the Field Force. He was released to duty on July 22, 1917.

In June 1918, the Kensingtons (as the 13th Battalion of the London Regiment was known) were in the area of Arras. At the time of William George's death, there were no recorded actions in the War Diaries of the 13th Battalion.¹⁸ However, on 14 June, William George was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station (stationed at Wavrans) with gunshot wounds to the head and both legs fractured.¹⁹ He died the next day and was buried in the Pernes British Military Cemetery, Plot 5, Row A, Grave No. 25.²⁰ His wife, his next-of-kin, was notified by letter. The inscription on his headstone reads "Dearly Loved and Sadly Missed." The cemetery lies one kilometre west of Pernes-Artois, in the region of Pas de Calais.

William George received the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918) for his service.²¹

No military records could be found for his brother, George Frederick. In 1911, at age 24 before his marriage, he was a railway clerk,²² but the 1939 England and Wales Register lists him as a dental rubber maker.²³ He appears to have lived his whole life in St. Pancras, dying there in 1976.²⁴

William George's next brother, Cecil Alfred, emigrated to Australia in 1909, at age 19.²⁵ He married²⁶ and settled there. While there is no evidence that he fought in the Great War, he did enlist in the Australian Army in 1942.²⁷ He lived in Queensland until his death in 1960, at age 70.²⁸

The youngest brother, Leslie Charles, born in 1900, would have been too young to enlist in World War 1. In 1939 he was a coach builder joiner,²⁹ and he died in Leicestershire in 1984.³⁰

William George's son, Leslie Henry, known as Les, became quite famous. He was a musician, and toured the world making radio broadcasts, to the extent that he was called "the globe-trotting pianist".³¹ Indeed, by the age of 27, he had already broadcast in India, Ceylon, Java, China, Japan, Australia, Cuba, Hawaii, as well as Britain.³² The *Bognor Regis Observer* reported in 1950 that on one occasion, while broadcasting live in Cuba, his announcer was shot dead by a revolutionary.³³ The article also states that he served as a flight lieutenant in the Royal Air Force during the Second World War, and was once in charge of live broadcasting on the foreign broadcasting service of the British Broadcasting Company.

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¹ "London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813–1917," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 25 October 2018), entry for William George Hilsden, Record type: Baptism, Borough: Kentish Town, Register type: Parish Registers

² "London, England, Church of England Marriages and Banns, 1754–1932," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 10 October 2018), entry for William Day Hilsden

³ "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 27 October 2018), entry for William Housden [*sic*], Registration district: Kentish Town, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 13, Piece: 133, Folio: 33, Page: 9

⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Birth Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 27 November 2018), entry for Annie Jardine, Registration district: Hackney, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1b, Page: 327

⁵ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 11 November 2018), entry for Annie Hilsden, Registration district: Islington, Registration district number: 10, Sub-registration district: Tollington, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 7, Household schedule number: 312, Piece: 827

⁶ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 11 November 2018), entry for Annie Hilsden, Registration district: St Pancras, Sub-registration district: Kentish Town, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 24, Piece: 157, Folio: 43, Page: 29, Household schedule number: 207

⁷ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 21 October 2018), entry for William Day Hilsden, Registration district: Pancras, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1b, Page: 114

⁸ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 11 November 2018), entry for William G. Hilsden, Registration district: St Pancras, Sub-registration district: Kentish Town, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 24, Piece: 157, Folio: 43, Page: 29, Household schedule number: 207

⁹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Marriage Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 26 October 2018), entry for William George Hilsden, Registration district: Westminster, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1a, Page: 1198

¹⁰ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 21 October 2018), entry for William Charles Hilsden, Registration district: St Marylebone, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1a, Page: 340

¹¹ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1837–1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 21 October 2018), entry for William Richard Hilsden, Registration district: St Marylebone, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1a, Page: 311

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- ¹² "1939 Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 6 November 2018), entry for Leslie H. Hilsden, Schedule number: 237, Sub-schedule number: 1, Enumeration district: QATY, Registration district: 384/5
- ¹³ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 17 October 2018), entry for Rosetta Hilsden, Registration district: Pancras, Inferred county: London, Volume: 1b, Page: 23
- ¹⁴ "UK, WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 5 November 2018), entry for William George Hilsden
- ¹⁵ *Army Service Numbers 1881–1918* (<http://armyservicenumbers.blogspot.com/2008/10/13th-county-of-london-bn-london.html>: accessed 15 October 2018)
- ¹⁶ "Kensington Regiment (Princess Louise's)," *Wikipedia* ([https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kensington_Regiment_\(Princess_Louise%27s\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kensington_Regiment_(Princess_Louise%27s)): accessed 20 October 2018)
- ¹⁷ "Military Hospitals Admissions and Discharge Registers WW1," *Forces War Records* (<https://www.forces-war-records.co.uk/collections/129/military-hospitals-admissions-and-discharge-registers-ww1>: accessed 11 November 2018), entry for Hilsden W.G.
- ¹⁸ "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 12 November 2018), entry for London Regiment, 56th Division, Sub-unit: 1/13th Battalion (Kensington), Piece description: Piece 2955/1-6
- ¹⁹ "No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station," *British Isles Family History Society of Greater Ottawa* (www.bifhsgo.ca: accessed 5 November 2018), entry for Wilsden, W. [sic]
- ²⁰ *Commonwealth War Graves Commission* (www.cwgc.org: accessed 3 September 2018), entry for Hilsden, William George, Service No: 492883
- ²¹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914–1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 6 June 2018), entry for William G. Hilsden
- ²² "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 11 November 2018), entry for George Frederick Hilsden, Registration district: Islington, Registration district number: 10, Sub-registration district: Tollington, Enumeration district, institution, or vessel: 7, Household schedule number: 312, Piece: 827
- ²³ "1939 Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 6 November 2018), entry for George F. Hilsden, Schedule number: 80, Sub-schedule number; 1, Enumeration district: ASRQ:
- ²⁴ "England & Wales, Civil Registration Death Index, 1916–2007," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 17 October 2018), entry for George Frederick Hilsden, Registration district: St Pancras, Inferred county: London, Volume: 14, Page: 1987
- ²⁵ "Fremantle, Western Australia, Passenger Lists, 1897-1963," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed October 26 2018), entry for Cecil A. Hilsden
- ²⁶ "Australia, Marriage Index, 1788–1950," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 8 November 2018), entry for Cecil Alfred Hilsden, Page number: 11663
- ²⁷ "Australia, WWI Service Records, 1939–1945," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.ca: accessed 11 November 2018), entry for: Cecil Alfred Hilsden, Service number: Q201277
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- ³¹ *Montrose, Arbroath and Brechin Review and Forfar and Kincardineshire Advertiser*, 29 January 1937, page 6, *British Newspaper Archive* (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk: accessed 10 October 2018)
- ³² *Dundee Evening Telegraph*, 2 Feb 1937, page 9, *British Newspaper Archive* (www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk: accessed 10 October 2018)

³³ *Bognor Regis Observer*, 16 September 1950, page 5, *British Newspaper Archive*
(www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk; accessed 10 October 2018)