

Private Elvin Harry Davis

Regimental number: 2709

8th Battalion, The Queen's (Royal West Surrey Regiment)

born: 10 November 1886 - died: 30 April 1916

Private Elvin Harry Davis was born on 10 November 1886 near Reading, Berkshire and was baptised in the parish church in Welwyn, Hertfordshire on 2 January 1887.¹ He was the son of William and Sarah Davis. Both parents were born in Hertfordshire – William in about 1860 in Welwyn and Sarah (née Bennett) in about 1859 in Digswell.² William and Sarah were married in Welwyn on 21 April 1878.³ They had six children: Annie (probably born in 1877),⁴ William (born on 29 December 1879),⁵ Lizzie (born on 2 March 1882),⁶ Sarah (born on 27 October 1884),⁷ Elvin Harry and Frank (born in about 1887).⁸

In 1881, William and Sarah were living at Mill Lane in Welwyn, where William was a fly driver. Their first four children were born in or near Welwyn (Annie, William, Lizzie and Sarah). The family probably did not move to Reading, Berkshire, even though the next two children (Elvin and Frank) were born there. Perhaps Sarah just went to Reading (about 65 miles away) to have her children, since Elvin was baptised in Welwyn.

In 1891, the family was living in Welwyn, where William was a cab driver.⁹ By 1901, the family had moved to London.¹⁰ William and Sarah were living with two of their children – Frank and Elvin – at 73 Acklam Road in Christchurch Notting Hill, Kensington, London. William was working as a tin plate worker for a railway. Their son, Frank, was also working as a railway fitter labourer. His other siblings had dispersed: Annie was a servant living in Islington, London;¹¹ William had married and was living in Tewin, Herefordshire and working as a labourer;¹² Lizzie was working as a servant in Hampton Wick, Surrey;¹³ and Sarah was probably working as a cook in Kensington, London.¹⁴

Elvin's mother, Sarah, died the following year, at the age of 42. However, in 1907 William remarried, marrying Ada Milsom in 1907.¹⁵ Ada was the former Ada May Sutton, born in 1875, the daughter of George Frederick and Harriett Eliza Sutton.¹⁶ In 1899, Ada had married Percival George Milsom,¹⁷ but he died in 1904.¹⁸ William and Ada had had a daughter, Louisa Ada Davis, in about 1908. In 1911, Elvin was living with his father and step-mother at 102 West End Road, Southall in London.¹⁹ He was a clerk with the Great Western Railway, where his father was also working as a tin plate worker.

Elvin enlisted as a Private in the 8th Battalion of the Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment in Marylebone, London²⁰ and then joined the British Expeditionary Force in France on 31 August 1915.²¹ He died just eight months later, at the age of 19.

In April 1916 the 8th Battalion was stationed near Dranoutre, Belgium.²² The Battalion's tour in the trenches between 27 - 29 April was generally quiet, with the exception of machine gun and rifle fire at night. However, the Battalion was on gas alert the whole time as the wind was generally from the east. Enemy deserters and prisoners of war reported the presence of gas in the German trenches. At 12.40 a.m. on 30 April there were rapid bursts of enemy machine gun fire and then at 12.45 a.m. "Gas was released in dense clouds and swept all over the Brigade front lasting until 2 a.m. Our machine guns swept the enemy parapet with the intention of piercing any gas cylinders."²³ Enemy parties attempted, and at one point succeeded, in entering the trenches. They were repulsed with bomb attacks. The gas had passed over by 2 a.m. but the Battalion suffered 110 casualties, mainly

because of the gas. "Very little warning was given of the arrival of gas as the enemy's machine gun fire successfully deafened the noise of egress from the pipes."²⁴

Elvin was likely injured in this gas attack because he died of gas poisoning at the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 30 April.²⁵ Elvin lost four comrades from his battalion in the few days at the end of April and beginning of May: Private Harry Ernest Homer, Private Richard Westfield, Private James Taylor and Corporal William Osborn Bush. Most of his comrades had been poisoned by chlorine gas. The effects of the gas attacks were also felt at the 1st CCCS, stationed near Bailleul,²⁶ which was just about five miles from Dranoutre.

Elvin was a member of the Church of England²⁷ and was buried in the Bailleul Communal Cemetery Extension, Nord (Plot II, Row D, Grave 134).²⁸ Bailleul is in France, close to the Belgian border. It was occupied on 14 October 1914 and became an important railhead, air depot and hospital centre. Several Casualty Clearing Stations, including the 1st Canadian, were quartered there for considerable periods. The earliest Commonwealth burials at Bailleul were made in April 1915. An extension was built and burials continued until April 1918, and occurred again in September and after the Armistice, when graves were brought in from the neighbouring battlefields.²⁹

His father, who was then living at 68 Half Acre Road, Hanwell, London, was notified of his death³⁰ and received the monies owing to Elvin from the army after his death.³¹

Elvin was awarded the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914-15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).³²

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¹ "Herefordshire baptisms," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 2 September 2015), entry for Harry Davis. Elvin Harry was known either as Elvin and Harry throughout his life.

² "1891 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 31 August 2015), entry for Harry Davis, Registration district: Hatfield, ED, institution, or vessel: 1, Piece: 1113, Folio: 18, Page Number: 30. The census records for 1901 show different places of birth – Leamington, Warwickshire for William and Aldworth, Berkshire for Sarah. "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 1 September 2015), entry for Elam H. Davis, Registration district: Kensington, Sub-registration district: Kensington Town, ED, institution, or vessel: 77, Piece: 32, Folio: 148, Page Number: 41, Household schedule number: 357

³ England Marriages 1538-1973," *findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 15 June 2015), entry for William Davis, County: Hertfordshire

⁴ "Herefordshire baptisms," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 23 September 2015), entry for Annie Bennett. Annie was baptised on 6 January 1878 in Digswell, so was probably born in late 1877. She was born before her mother, Sarah Bennett, married William Davis.

⁵ "Herefordshire baptisms," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 2 September 2015), entry for William Davis

⁶ "Herefordshire baptisms," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 2 September 2015), entry for Lizzie Davis

⁷ "Herefordshire baptisms," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 2 September 2015), entry for Sarah Davis

⁸ "1901 England Census," entry for Elam H. Davis

⁹ "1891 England Census," entry for Harry Davis

¹⁰ "1901 England Census," entry for Elam H. Davis

¹¹ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 September 2015), entry for Annie Bennett, Registration district: Islington, Sub-registration district: Upper Holloway, ED, institution, or vessel: 07, Piece: 159, Folio: 21, Page Number: 34, Household schedule number: 209

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- ¹² "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 September 2015), entry for William Davis, Registration district: Hertford, Sub-registration district: Hertford, ED, institution, or vessel: 2, Piece: 1304, Folio: 13, Page Number: 3, Household schedule number: 18
- ¹³ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 September 2015), entry for Lizzie Davis, Registration district: Edmonton, Sub-registration district: Hornsey, ED, institution, or vessel: 42, Piece: 1243, Folio: 167, Page Number: 44, Household schedule number: 287
- ¹⁴ "1901 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 September 2015), entry for Sarah Davis, Registration district: Kensington, Sub-registration district: Kensington Town, ED, institution, or vessel: 27, Piece: 23, Folio: 33, Page Number: 12, Household schedule number: 86
- ¹⁵ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 September 2015), entry for Ada Milsom, Registration district: Reading, Inferred County: Berkshire, Volume: 2c, Page: 571
- ¹⁶ "London, England, Births and Baptisms, 1813-1906," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 31 August 2015), entry for Ada May Sutton, Baptism, Upper Holloway St Paul, Islington, Parish Registers
- ¹⁷ "England & Wales, FreeBMD Marriage Index, 1837-1915," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 September 2015), entry for Ada Sutton, Registration district: Kensington, Inferred County: London, Volume: 1a, Page: 339
- ¹⁸ "England, Select Deaths and Burials, 1538-1991," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 23 September 2015), entry for Percival Milsom, FHL Film Number: 1849544, Reference ID: it 7 44270
- ¹⁹ "1911 England Census," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 31 August 2015), entry for Elvin Davis, Registration district: Uxbridge, Registration District Number: 127, Sub-registration district: Hayes, ED, institution, or vessel: 7, Household schedule number: 51, Piece: 6789
- ²⁰ "UK, Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 8 May 2015), entry for Elvin Harry Davis
- ²¹ "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 31 August 2015), entry for Elvin H. Davis
- ²² "UK, WWI War Diaries (France, Belgium and Germany), 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 7 August 2015), Regiment or Unit: Queen's (Royal West Surrey) Regiment, Sub Unit: 8th Battalion, Division: 24th Division, Diary Dates: 1915 Aug 1 - 1916 Aug 31, Piece Description: Piece 2214/1-5: 72 Infantry Brigade: 8 Battalion Queen's (Royal West Surrey) (1915 Aug - 1918 Jan), Piece Number: 2214
- ²³ *Ibid.*
- ²⁴ *Ibid.*
- ²⁵ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," *Library and Archives Canada*, (records accessed 2013 & 2015), Record Group 9, series IIC10, volume 4556, Record number 66
- ²⁶ "War Diaries of the First World War: 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station 1914/08/13-1919/03/31," *Library and Archives Canada* (http://data4.collectionscanada.gc.ca/netacgi/nph-brs?s1=casualty+clearing&s13=&s12=&l=20&s9=RG9&s7=9-52&Sect1=IMAGE&Sect2=THESOFF&Sect4=AND&Sect5=WARDPEN&Sect6=HITOFF&d=FINDD&p=1&u=http://www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/archivianet/02015202_e.html&r=1&f=G; accessed 17 June 2015)
- ²⁷ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 66
- ²⁸ "Commonwealth War Graves Commission," (www.cwgc.org; accessed 31 August 2015), entry for Davis, E. H., Service No: 2709
- ²⁹ "Bailleul Communal Cemetery, Nord," Commonwealth War Graves Commission (<http://www.cwgc.org/find-a-cemetery/cemetery/2000047/Bailleul%20Communal%20Cemetery.%20Nord>; accessed 5 August 2015)
- ³⁰ "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Record number 66
- ³¹ "UK, Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk; accessed 31 August 2015), entry for Eloni Harry Davis
- ³² "British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 November 2015), entry for Elvin H. Davis