

## **Regimental Sergeant Major George Ernest Evelyn Hewes**

### **Distinguished Conduct Medal**

George Ernest Evelyn Hewes was born in Leicester in August 1882 to Allen and Harriett Hewes (née Thompson) of 51 Dorset Street. His father came from Arthingworth in Northamptonshire and worked as a gardener and his mother was a dressmaker. They had married in February 1861 in the Leicestershire parish of Wistow, which included Harriett's home place of Newton Harcourt, and lived initially in the neighbouring parish of Kilby, where their first child was born. By the time of the 1871 Census four children had arrived and the family was settled in Leicester. George was the ninth of their ten children and was baptised on 17<sup>th</sup> September 1882 in St Matthew's Church.

During the 1890s George's father continued working mainly as a gardener, but by 1898 Allen Hewes was employed as a bill inspector at the Empire Music Hall in Wharf Street. On 11<sup>th</sup> May of that year whilst at his work he had an accident from which he never recovered, dying a month later.<sup>1</sup> By this time several of George's older siblings were already working in the shoe trade and in 1901, now aged 18, he himself was employed as a shoe warehouseman. He and his younger brother Arthur were the last of the family living at home in Dorset Street with their widowed mother.

George's army career began on 30<sup>th</sup> December 1905 when he joined The King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI), becoming Private Hewes 8796 of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion. Although most recruits came from south Yorkshire George's oldest brother Charles was a soldier in this regiment. He enlisted in 1886 initially with the Leicestershire Regiment but transferring almost immediately to the King's Own Light Infantry (South Yorkshire Regiment), later renamed the KOYLI. By 1901 Charles was a Sergeant Instructor of Musketry, based at Pontefract and perhaps it was his brother's experience that encouraged George to enlist in the same regiment.

Although George's service record does not survive, the 1911 Census reveals that by that date he had been promoted to Corporal and was serving in Hong Kong. Two years later the battalion moved to duties in Singapore. Following the outbreak of war it returned to England, arriving in Southampton on 9<sup>th</sup> November 1914 before being deployed to the Western Front. A newspaper report published at the time of his death notes that George was on leave when war was declared and that he was recalled to duty in order to go to France.

He must have been granted home leave to Leicester for on Christmas Eve 1914 George married Mary Freeman in the church of St Michael and All Angels, Belgrave. He was now 32 and lodging at 81 Lancashire Street. His mother had by this time moved to Gypsy Lane in Belgrave, where she lived with her son Albert, his wife Lily and their son Allen. George's bride was the older sister of Sergeant William (Bill) Freeman, another member of the Belgrave Working Men's Club and winner of the Military Medal. She was born in Kirby Muxloe but her family had settled in Belgrave by 1891 and at the time of her marriage she was working as a hosiery hand. Her father had been in the shoe trade but was now a gardener.

At some stage George transferred from the 1<sup>st</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion of the KOYLI, most likely when experienced NCOs were needed for the volunteer battalions of Kitchener's New Army. The 6<sup>th</sup> had been formed at Pontefract on 12<sup>th</sup> August 1914 and after training landed at Boulogne on 21<sup>st</sup> May 1915. The same date is found on George's Medal Roll Card denoting when he first 'qualified' as having served overseas in France.

The 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion's war diary notes that at 7pm on 21<sup>st</sup> May the troops entrained at Aldershot for Folkestone and were played to the station by the band of the 8<sup>th</sup> Battalion Devonshire Regiment. In total 31 officers and 947 men, including those in an advance party, were dispatched across the Channel.<sup>2</sup> From this time until it was disbanded in 1918 the 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion served on the Western Front taking part in numerous actions, mostly around Ypres and the Somme.

It was during this deployment in 1916 that 8796 Company Sergeant Major (Acting Sergeant Major) GEE Hewes, 6<sup>th</sup> Battalion Yorkshire Light Infantry, was recommended for the Distinguished Conduct Medal (DCM). George's award was announced on 3<sup>rd</sup> June<sup>3</sup>, with the citation following later in the month:

"For conspicuous good work when organising carrying parties and the distribution of supplies, frequently under shell fire."<sup>4</sup>

The details of George's service in this period are not known, except that a newspaper report of his death in 1938 noted that he had been badly wounded at Passchendaele in 1917, causing the loss of an eye and damaging his health later in life.<sup>5</sup> His army pension record recorded that he had suffered a gunshot wound to his left eye.

At some stage he may have been repatriated for treatment or convalescence, but it is not until 1919 that he appears in army records as a patient in the Military Hospital at Catterick Camp in Yorkshire. He was still an Acting Regimental Sergeant Major but now attached to POW staff. He was admitted on 17<sup>th</sup> June 1919, having transferred from another, unnamed hospital, and had an operation the following day. On 10<sup>th</sup> July he was discharged to 7 days' light duty.

As a regular soldier George might have expected to continue in service after the war, but his injury led to him leaving the army on 18<sup>th</sup> September 1919 and being awarded a disablement pension. As a result of his war service George received the 1914-15 Star, the British War Medal, the Victory Medal and a Silver War Badge, denoting that he was invalided out as a result of war injuries. In all, he had served with the colours for just short of 14 years.

With over 300 Club members, including the other seven men who had won medals, George was present at the Belgrave Working Men's Club and Institute on the evening of Tuesday 11<sup>th</sup> November 1919 at a supper and entertainment to welcome back all those members who had served in the war and to commemorate those who did not return. The Club's magnificent Roll of Honour was unveiled and each medal winner was presented with a framed photograph of the eight of them together.<sup>6</sup> It is interesting to note that George's older brother Albert was steward at the Club from 1913 until his death in 1932.<sup>7</sup>

In 1918 and 1919 George's home address was given as 21 Checkett's Road, Leicester, the location of the Working Men's Club where Albert and his wife Lily worked, but by 1921 George and his wife Mary were at the Fleur de Lis public house at 37 Belgrave Gate. Also at this address was Arthur William Harrison, a widower, who was the licensee and a local manager for the brewery company. All three were employed by Hansons Brewers Ltd of Kimberley, Nottinghamshire. Mr Harrison died in 1927, after which George became the licensee. In total he worked at the pub for approximately 17 years before leaving through ill-health. In the last year of his life he ran an off-licence and general stores at 152 Dorset Street, the same street in which had had been born.

George died at home on 15<sup>th</sup> January 1938, aged 55, leaving his widow Mary.<sup>8</sup> He was buried on 20<sup>th</sup> January in Belgrave cemetery and the *Leicester Daily Mercury* reported that his funeral, held at St Michael's Church, was to be a semi-military one.<sup>9</sup> He was interred with his older brother Albert and

sister-in-law Lily. His widow Mary continued to run the Dorset Street store and died in 1961 at the age of 79.

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<sup>1</sup> *Leicester Chronicle*, 25<sup>th</sup> June 1898, p6.

<sup>2</sup> The National Archives, WO95/1906/1

<sup>3</sup> *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 3<sup>rd</sup> June 1916, p8.

<sup>4</sup> Supplement to *The London Gazette*, 21<sup>st</sup> June 1916, p6145

<sup>5</sup> *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1938, p19.

<sup>6</sup> *Leicester Evening Mail*, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1919, p2, and *Leicester Daily Post*, 12<sup>th</sup> November 1919, p2.

<sup>7</sup> *Leicester Evening Mail*, 26<sup>th</sup> April 1932, p10.

<sup>8</sup> *Leicester Evening Mail*, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1938, p9.

<sup>9</sup> *Leicester Daily Mercury*, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1938, p19.