

101: Thomas Bell

Basic Information [as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC]

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Thomas Bell

Rank: Corporal

Battalion / Regiment: 8th Bn. Cheshire Regiment

Service Number: 11716

Date of Death: 1 February 1917

Age at Death: ?

Buried / Commemorated at: Basra Memorial, Al Basrah, Basra, Iraq

Additional information given by CWGC: None

Thomas Bell was the ninth child, of twelve, of farm worker Samuel and Margaret Bell and he was born in South Knapdale, Argyllshire. He was a younger brother of Hughie Bell, and two years older than Donald Bell, brothers who were also killed in WW1 [see entries [99: Donald McAckran Bell](#) and [100: Hugh Bell](#)].

In 1901, having recently left western Scotland, the family was involved in agriculture in western Kent, on the Medway:

| | | | | | | |
|----------------|----------|----|------------------------|--------|--------------------|-----------|
| Samuel Bell | Head | 43 | Ploughman on farm | Worker | Ireland Co. Antrim | Ballymena |
| Margaret B. | Wife | 40 | dairymaid | | Scotland Renfrew | Kilmacolm |
| Elizabeth Bell | Daughter | 16 | domestic servant | Worker | Scotland Argyll | Knapdale |
| Robert B. | Son | 14 | ordinary farm labourer | | Do | Do |
| Alice B. | Daughter | 12 | | | Do | Do |
| Hugh B. | Son | 10 | | | Do | Do |
| Thomas B. | Son | 7 | | | Do | Do |
| Donald B. | Son | 5 | | | Do | Do |
| David B. | Son | 2 | | | Do | Do |

1901 census – Frog's Bridge Cottages, Hadlow, Tonbridge, Kent

| | | | |
|-------------|----|------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Samuel Bell | 43 | ploughman on farm | born Ballymena, Co. Antrim |
| Margaret | 40 | dairymaid | born Kilmacolm, Renfrew, Scotland |
| Elizabeth | 16 | domestic servant | born Knapdale, Argyllshire |
| Robert | 14 | ordinary farm labourer | born Knapdale |
| Alice | 12 | | born Knapdale |
| Hugh | 10 | | born Knapdale |
| Thomas | 7 | | born Knapdale |
| Donald | 5 | | born Knapdale |
| David | 2 | | born Knapdale |

Although the family had lived in Argyllshire for many years they had, for reasons unknown, moved to Kent in about 1900 and it was here that their last child, Margaret Campbell Bell, was born in the 2nd quarter of 1902.

However, by the time of the 1911 census the family had moved again and were now living in the village of Lacey Green, midway between Princes Risborough and High Wycombe:

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.

Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.

Number of Schedule 132
(To be filled up by the Enumerator after collection.)

The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.

| NAME AND SURNAME | RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family. | AGE (last birthday) and SEX. | PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE. | | | | PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards. | | | BIRTHPLACE of every person. | NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country. | INFIRMITY. |
|-------------------|---------------------------------|------------------------------|--|--|----------------------|---|---|--------------------------|-----|-----------------------------|--|------------|
| | | | State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of— | Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.) | Personal Occupation. | Industry or Service with which worker is connected. | Whether Employee, Worker, or Working on Own Account. | Whether Working at Home. | | | | |
| 1 Samuel Bell | Head | 53 | Married | 32 | 78 | 78 | 8 | Stock man on farm | 120 | Worke | Co. Antrim, Ballymena | 630 |
| 2 Margaret Bell | Wife | 49 | Married | 32 | 12 | 10 | 2 | | | Worke | Renfrewshire, Kilmacoll | 525 |
| 3 Thomas Bell | Son | 17 | Single | | | | | Farm labourer | 140 | Worke | Argyllshire, Knapdale | 50 |
| 4 Donald Mc. Bell | Son | 15 | Single | | | | | Farm labourer | 390 | | Argyllshire, Knapdale | |
| 5 David Bell | Son | 12 | | | | | | school | | | Argyllshire, Knapdale | |
| 6 Margaret Bell | Daughter | 9 | | | | | | school | | | Kent, Hadlow | 890 |

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

| | | | |
|---|---|--------|---------|
| I certify that— | | Total. | |
| (1) All the ages on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex column. | (2) I have counted the males and females in Columns 3 and 4 respectively, and have compared their sum with the total number of persons. | Males | Females |
| (3) After making the necessary inquiries I have completed all entries on this Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous. | | 14 | 2 |

Initials of Enumerator: H.S.V.

(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)

Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (House, Tenement, or Apartment). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom; nor warehouse, office, shop.

I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Signature: Samuel Bell

Postal Address: Lacey Green Princes Risborough Bucks

4 Rooms

1911 census (condensed) – Lac[e]y Green, Princes Risborough, Buckinghamshire

| | | | |
|-------------|----|------------------|------------------------------|
| Samuel Bell | 53 | stockman on farm | born Ballymena, Co. Antrim |
| Margaret | 49 | | born Kilmacoll, Renfrewshire |
| Thomas | 17 | farm labourer | born Argyllshire, Knapdale |
| Donald Mc. | 15 | farm labourer | born Knapdale |
| David | 12 | | born Knapdale |
| Margaret | 9 | | born Kent, Hadlow |

Samuel and Margaret had been married for 32 years and ten of their twelve children had survived.

It is not known what previous connection Thomas Bell had with Burton or Puddington although it is known that the brothers came to the area for agricultural work. However, in 1911, a Thomas Bell was living in Puddington; single, aged 50, he was a farm labourer and had been born in Burton. In earlier years the name Bell was recorded several times in Puddington, Burton and Ness and it is possible that Thomas Bell had relatives who originated from this area, although no ancestral connection has been found.

The 8th (Service) Battalion Cheshire Regiment was formed at Chester on 12 August 1914 as part of Kitchener's New Army and it came under the orders of the 40th Brigade, 13th (Western) Division.

The *Birkenhead News* and *Birkenhead Advertiser* of 29 August 1914 reported that Donald Bell, Thomas's younger brother, was from Puddington and had enlisted for the Expeditionary Force; it is further believed that he enlisted in Birkenhead. Clearly, both

Donald and Thomas enlisted for the 8th Battalion Cheshire Regiment at the same time and same place - their Service Numbers are consecutive.

In the same regiment, the early military experiences of Donald and Thomas would have been very similar and both are commemorated on the Basra Memorial in Iraq.

In June 1915 the troops of the 8th Battalion Cheshire Regiment embarked for Egypt and then moved to Gallipoli. In January 1916 they were evacuated from the disastrous Gallipoli campaign to Egypt and the following month sailed to Mesopotamia (now Iraq) where the battalion remained. They were in action in The Battle of Kut al Amara, the capture of the Hai Salient, the capture of Dahra Bend and the passage of the Diyala, in the pursuit of the enemy towards Baghdad. Units of the 13th Division were the first troops to enter Baghdad, when it fell on 11 March 1917.

In February 1917 the 13th division began to take part in the new offensive. This new Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force outnumbered the Turkish army two to one. Maude was a more cautious leader than General Nixon and carefully moved his troops forward. The 13th Division was targeted on the Turkish defensive line along the river Hai. Between the 25th January and 5th February this line was taken and the division moved on to a second Turkish strongpoint at Dahra Bend that was taken on the 16th February.

The History of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment Mark Smith 2014 MCSmith Publishing

Arthur Crookenden noted:

TIGRIS.

Attempts to relieve Kut, 4th January to 24th April, 1916.

Map p. 219

The 8th Battalion, under Captain F. H. C. Wilcox, reached Mesopotamia with the 13th Division on the 28th of February, 1916. They had taken part in the evacuations at Suvla and Helles as already recorded. Men who had landed at Suvla were veterans by now and few of them were left in the ranks. The Battalion had been filled up with drafts, many of whom were now seasoned and bronzed, but they had had very little training and there was a pronounced shortage of young officers and of experienced non-commissioned officers. Of the officers who had been with the Battalion in August only three arrived in Basra, besides the Quartermaster, J. Murphy, who worthily filled this key post throughout the war. It is fitting here to pay tribute to that body of regular soldiers who, not only in our Regiment, but throughout the infantry, kept the flag of *esprit de corps* flying no matter how the personnel of a battalion changed. At the very end of the war, regular battalions could always be distinguished as such, and there can be no doubt that this preservation of their character was due to the man who was "always there," the Quartermaster. New Army Battalions, such as the 8th, were lucky to get an old Regular Sergeant-major as their Quartermaster, and to imbibe from him the steadiness and cheerfulness of the regular.

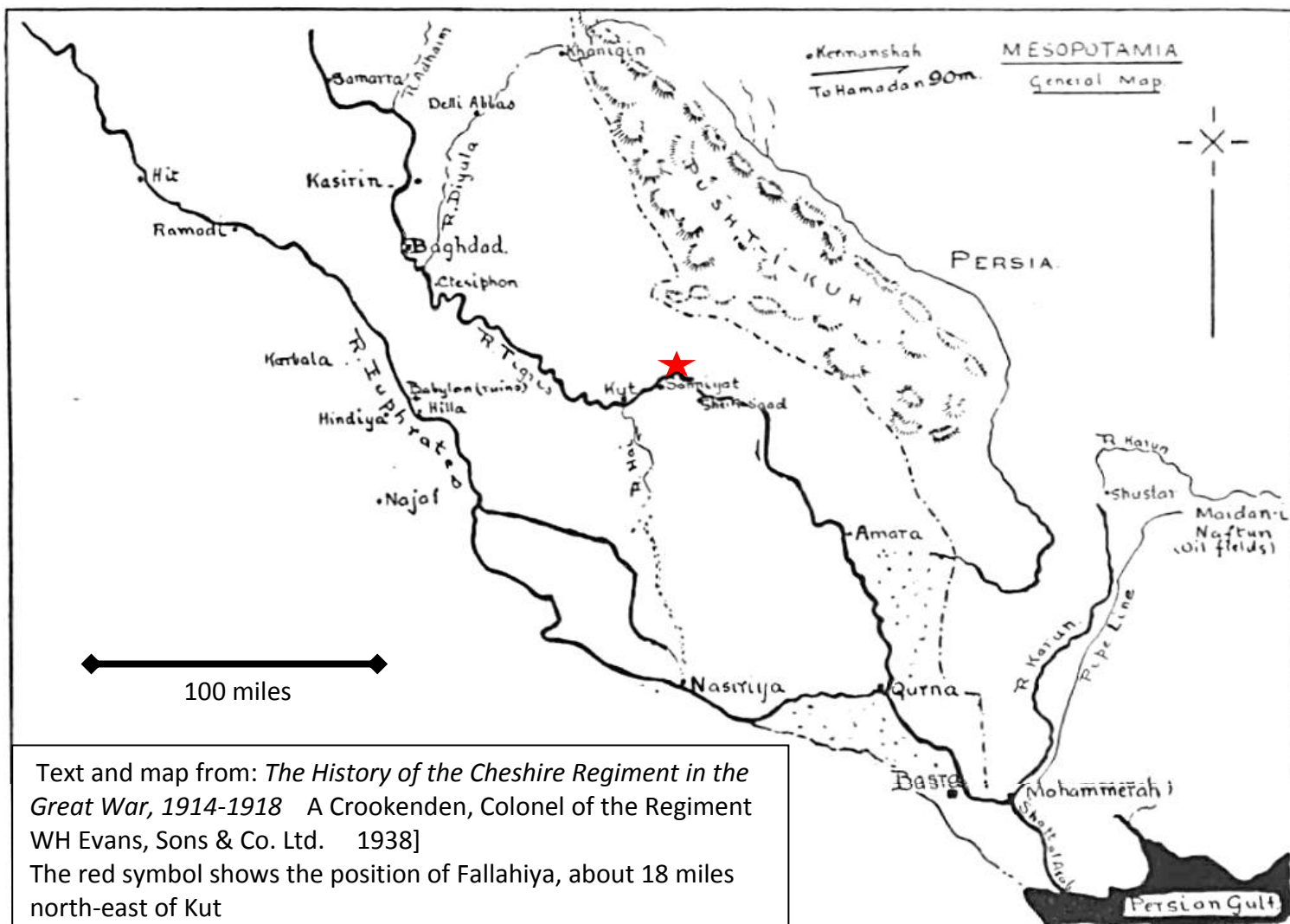
The 8th Battalion arrived in Mesopotamia, or Mespot as they called it, at a moment when hope of relieving the garrison besieged in Kut was almost gone. The great attack on the Dujaila (or Es Sinn) position had failed through too rigid adherence to the plan of attack, itself open to criticism on the ground of rigidity and over-caution on an occasion when it would have been justifiable to take a risk. This failure was one of a series of reverses, the like of which the British Army had never before experienced.

But as long as any smallest chance of relieving Kut remained, it had to be tried. The 8th Battalion spent a month training under Colonel W. W. B. Gover, a regular officer of The Regiment.

Action of Fallahiya.

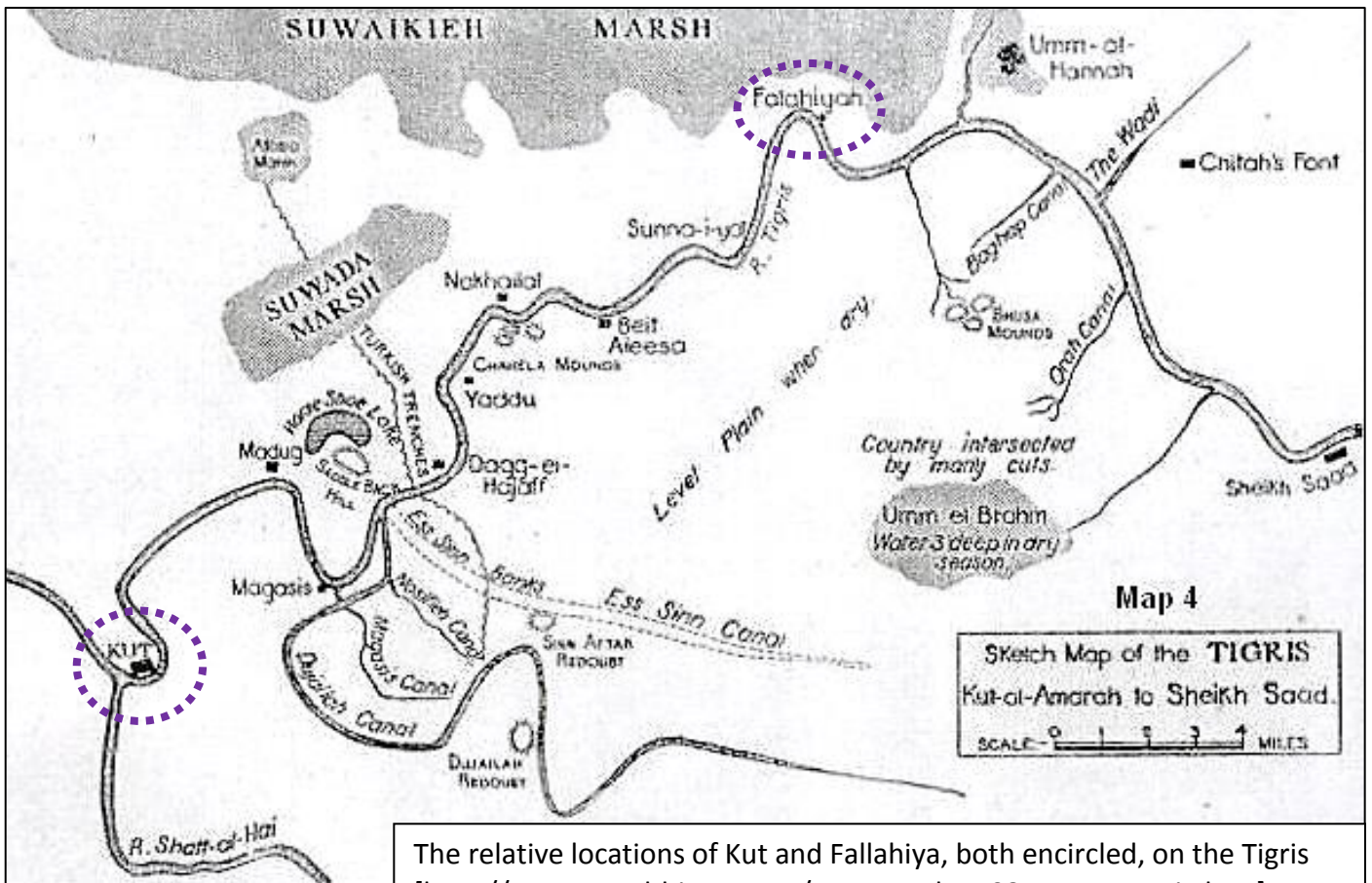
It was decided to make the next effort on the northern, or left bank of the Tigris. A river's banks are called right or left as they appear to one facing down stream. The first Turkish position, and apparently the only one on this side, was that at El Hanna.

Saps had been dug to within fifty yards of the enemy's wire, ample artillery was available, and we were able to bring fire to bear on the Turks from both flanks. The 13th Division had rehearsed the attack, during its month's training, over full scale dummy trenches. Every battalion, every company, knew its task thoroughly.

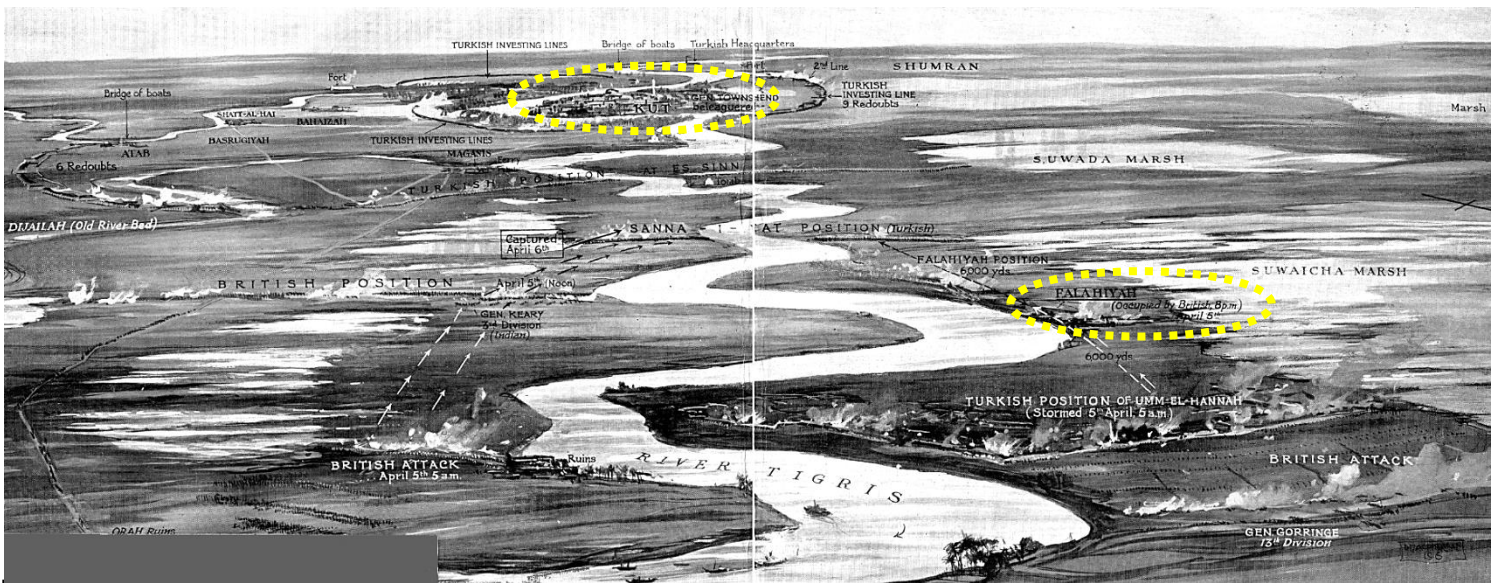


Text and map from: *The History of the Cheshire Regiment in the Great War, 1914-1918* A Crookenden, Colonel of the Regiment WH Evans, Sons & Co. Ltd. 1938]

The red symbol shows the position of Fallahiya, about 18 miles north-east of Kut



The relative locations of Kut and Fallahiya, both encircled, on the Tigris [http://www.naval-history.net/WW1Battle1408Mesopotamia.htm]



Surmised aerial view looking south-westwards along the featureless marshy plain of the Tigris. The positions of Fallahiya (front of view) and Kut have been encircled [https://norfolkinworldwar1.org/2016/04/29/the-2nd-battalion-of-the-norfolk-regiment-in-mesopotamia-april-1916/]

Whilst it is not clear precisely where, or how, Thomas Bell died, the 8th Battalion Cheshire Regiment was involved in the military actions around Fallahiya as they pushed westwards to relieve Kut and then onwards to Baghdad and it is supposed that Thomas was killed in this immediate area. Commemorated on the Basra Memorial, Thomas Bell's body was never recovered. The Basra Memorial commemorates more than 40,500 members of the Commonwealth

forces who died in the operations in Mesopotamia from the Autumn of 1914 to the end of August 1921 and whose graves are not known.

| | |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| DONALD BELL | PTE. CHES. R. |
| HUGH BELL | PTE. ARG. & SUTHD. HGRS. |
| THOMAS BELL | PTE. CHES. R. |

The inscription on the Memorial Plaque in Burton Parish Church

The three sons of Samuel and Margaret Bell all died within 9 months of each other:

| | |
|--------|----------------------------------|
| Thomas | died Thursday 1 February 1917 |
| Donald | died Wednesday 19 September 1917 |
| Hugh | died Friday 12 October 1917 |

| Name | Corps | Rank | Regt. No. |
|--|------------|-------|---------------|
| BELL | Ches R. | S/Cpl | 11716 |
| Thomas | | A/Cpl | |
| Medal | Roll | Page | Remarks |
| VICTORY | 5/2/101 B5 | 1221 | A - A 1/2/17. |
| BRITISH | -D- | -D- | |
| 15 th STAR | 8/2/1. B3 | 429 | |
| Theatre of War first served in 2 B7 Bulkan | | | |
| Date of entry therein 26/6/15. | | | |

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920



British troops recapturing Kut al-Amara on 24 February 1917
<https://www.scoopnest.com/user/prchovanec/835277511718219777-feb-24-1917-british-forces-recapture-kut-al-amara-iraq-scene-of-their-disastrous-surrender-to-turks-a-year-ago>

Note: The Commonwealth War Graves Commission website (<https://www.cwgc.org/>) previously showed Thomas' death as 1 October 1917. The CWGC was informed that *Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914/19* and his British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Card (above) indicated that he had been killed in action on 1 February and, accordingly, the CWGC record has been amended (July 2018).