

103: (Thomas) William Crofts

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Thomas William Crofts

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 9th Bn. Cheshire Regiment

Service Number: 11720

Date of Death: 05 November 1916

Age at Death: 21

Buried / Commemorated at: Boulogne Eastern Cemetery, Boulogne-sur-Mer, Departement du Pas-de-Calais, Nord-Pas-de-Calais, France

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of William and Hannah Crofts of Puddington

William Crofts of Broughton married Hannah Hill at St Bartholomew's Church, Sealand, in late 1877 and they had nine children (one of whom died young). Thomas William Crofts was the seventh of the surviving children, and their only son. The family name is commonly misspelled as Croft.

In the 1891 census, before the birth of William, the family was living in Puddington:

William Croft	Head	Mar	34	Labourer	Broughton
Hannah	Wife	do	33		Sealand
Mary E.	Daughter	SP	10		do
Annie	do	SP	8		Puddington
Martha	do	SP	5		do
Jessie	do	SP	2		do
Alice	do	do	6 months		do

1891 census (extract) – Puddington (near Puddington Old Hall)

William Croft	34	labourer	born Broughton
Hannah	33		born Sealand
Mary E.	10		born Sealand
Annie	8		born Puddington
Martha	5		born Puddington
Jessie	2		born Puddington
Alice	6 months		born Puddington

By the time of the 1901 census the three eldest children were living away from home; Mary's location has not been found but both Annie (18, domestic cook) and Martha (16, kitchenmaid) were servants in the household of 80-year old widow Jane Fleming at 46 Liverpool Road, Chester. Thomas, Edith and Alice had now been born; Thomas was born in late 1895 and Elsie was born in April / June 1898.

Annie Crofts (21) married widower James Naylor (32) on 20 October 1904 at Burton; Mary Ellen Croft was a witness. James, who originated from Blackburn, was a house painter and already had two children. At the time of the 1911 census James and Annie, who now had two small children, were living at 26 Edmundson Street in Blackburn.

William Crofts	Head	211	44	General Labourer	Worker	Wrexham, Denfair
Hannah Do	Wife	211	43	Household Duties		Broughton Lee
Thomas William Do	Son	5	5			Chester, Queen's Ferry
Jessie Crofts	Daughter	5	12			Do Puddington
Alice Do	Daughter	5	10			Do Do
Edith Do	Daughter	5	8			Do Do
Elsie Do	Daughter	5	2			Do Do

1901 census (extract) – near Chapel House Farm, Chapel Lane, Puddington

William Crofts	44	general labourer	born Broughton
Hannah	43	domestic duties	born Queen's Ferry
Thomas William	5		born Puddington
Jessie	12		born Puddington
Alice	10		born Puddington
Edith	8		born Puddington
Elsie	2		born Puddington

Thomas William Crofts was born in Puddington on 6 September 1895 and he was baptised at Burton on 6 October.

In 1911 William Crofts, now recorded as a gamekeeper, and Hannah, were still in Puddington with the younger members of his family:

1	William Crofts	Head	54	Married	33	9	8	7	Game Keeper	479				Broughton	
2	Hannah Crofts	Wife	54	Married	33	9	8	1			0			Queen's Ferry	
3	Jessie Crofts	Daughter	22	Single							0			Puddington	
4	Thomas William Crofts	Son	15	Single					Farm Labourer	140				Puddington	
5	Elsie Crofts	Daughter	12						School	390	1			Puddington	
6	Gladys Crofts	Daughter	2 months											Chester	122

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)

Total		
Males	Females	Persons
2	4	6

(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 (Kitchens, Parlours, or Apartments). Count the Kitchen as a room but do not count cellars, landing, lobby, closets, bathrooms; nor warehouses, offices, shops.

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

Signature: *William Crofts*

Postal Address: *Puddington, Burton, Chester*

1911 census (condensed) – Puddington

William Crofts	54	game keeper	born Broughton
Hannah	54		born Queen's Ferry
Jessie	22		born Puddington
Thomas William	15	farm labourer	born Puddington
Elsie	12		born Puddington
Gladys	2 months	granddaughter	born Chester

William and Hannah had been married for 33 years and eight of their nine children had survived. Gladys Crofts, baptised at Burton on 25 August 1911, was the illegitimate daughter of Jessie.

In 1911 Martha (25, domestic cook) and Edith (18, parlour maid) were servants in the household of the Reverend Frank Selwyn Macauley Bennett at Hawarden Rectory. Alice Crofts (20) was a parlour maid in the household of GP Dr William Henry Dobie at 2 Hunter Street, Chester.

Of Thomas William Croft's siblings born in Puddington it is known that

Anne baptised as Annie, at Burton, on 20 May 1883. Annie Croft (21) married widower James Naylor (32, of Blackburn) at Burton on 20 October 1904 and they subsequently lived in Blackburn. They have not been located in the 1939 Register and it is unknown when they died.

Martha possibly born 20 August 1885; baptised at Burton on 20 September 1885. She may have married joiner James Garrick Kinsell (born 14 May 1886) at St Oswald's Church, Chester, in late 1930. James and Martha were recorded at 'Kingcroft', Chester Road, Saughall in 1939. Martha died, aged 76, in the Chester district in early 1962 and James Kinsell died in West Cheshire in mid-1970.

Jessie baptised, privately, at Burton on 10 May 1888. She gave birth to an illegitimate daughter, Gladys, who was baptised at Burton on 25 August 1911. Jessie married Edward Millitt (or *Millitt*) at a Civil Marriage on Wirral in April / June 1921. In the 1939 Register they were living with William, Jessie's father, at Laundry Cottage, Puddington:

William Crofts	widower	born 23 April 1854	gardener
Edward Millitt	married	born 23 May 1886	railway sheeter?
Jessie Millitt	married	born 3 May 1888	laundry maid
Gladys Crofts	single	born 3 January 1911	dairy maid
William R Edge	married	born 21 February 1881	head man to racehorse trainer

Gladys Crofts, 30, married Charles Robert Ratcliffe of Hawarden at Burton on 12 April 1941. Charles, aged 34, was a 2nd Sergeant in the RAF. Gladys did not record her father's name.

William Crofts, the father of the family, died 5 February 1945 aged 90.

Edward Millitt died in West Cheshire in early-1951 aged 64. Jessie died in early 1965 aged 76.

It is not known when Gladys and Charles Ratcliffe died.

Alice baptised at Burton on 30 November 1890. She may have married Thomas Taylor at a Civil Marriage in Chester in mid-1921 and had a son, Francis Edward Hedley Taylor, in late 1921.

The family has not been located in the 1939 Register.

Edith baptised at Burton on 6 November 1892. Nothing further is known of her.

Elsie baptised at Burton on 19 June 1898. Elsie Crofts married Francis Horace Maertenscrofts Poole at Chester Cathedral in early 1923 and at the time of the 1939 Register they were living at 'Dunkirk Villas', Lea by Backford, Chester:

Francis H Poole	married	born 13 July 1883	roller in sheet steel mills
Elsie	married	born 24 April 1898	

Two lines of the Register have been redacted but are believed to record the details of William R Poole (born mid-1924) and Beryl Poole (born mid-1926)

Neville	single	born 5 January 1929	
Joan	single	born 3 December 1930	

Joan, who recorded her name as Maertens-Poole, married George Henry Fairclough in West Cheshire in late 1952

Two further lines of the Register have been redacted

Although Thomas's Service Record has not been found the *Birkenhead News* and *Birkenhead Advertiser* of 29 August 1914 recorded that he had enlisted for the Expeditionary Force, so it is clear that he had entered the army on the outbreak of war as Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August 1914.

Thomas enlisted in Birkenhead and it is very probable that he was a friend of Thomas Frearson [see entry [104: Thomas Frearson](#)] - in 1911 he was living very close to him in

Puddington and they probably enlisted together and served together in the 9th Battalion Cheshire Regiment.

Thomas was with the 9th (Service) Battalion Cheshire Regiment when he was wounded, gassed and died on Sunday 5 November 1916. Thomas cannot have joined the 9th Battalion when he enlisted as this was not created (in Chester) until 13 September 1914 as part of Kitchener's Second New Army. The battalion came under the orders of the 58th Brigade, 19th (Western) Division, and it is likely that Thomas was posted to the 9th immediately following its establishment. The 9th Battalion moved to Salisbury Plain and by December 1914 was in billets in Basingstoke, returning to Salisbury Plain in March 1915. On 19 July 1915 the troops landed at Boulogne.

It seems likely that Thomas William Crofts was injured, and subsequently died, in the closing stages of The Battle of Ancre Heights which took place from 1 October to 11 November 1916 and was one of The Battles of the Somme. The Commonwealth War Graves Commission provides the following introduction to the events around that time:

As a necessary preliminary to the Reserve Army's part in Haig's projected large-scale autumn offensive, General Gough sought to secure the whole of the Thiepval Ridge, and thereby obtain observation over the upper Ancre. Canadian troops returning from the trenches pass pack mules loaded with ammunition on a muddy road to the forward area. This necessitated the capture, in full, of those intricate defensive positions which had repeatedly blocked the way to the vital high ground during the September fighting: Schwaben Redoubt, Stuff Redoubt and Regina trench.

Between 1 and 8 October the Canadian Corps assaults on Regina Trench witnessed brutal fighting, heavy casualties and temporary limited occupation of the objective. Meanwhile, in a confusing succession of attacks, 18th and 39th Divisions struggled unremittingly to clear the Schwaben Redoubt of its last defenders. Stuff Redoubt was stormed just after midday on 9 October, and following vicious actions Schwaben Redoubt finally succumbed to the 39th Division in the afternoon of 14 October. The weather and appalling battlefield conditions delayed further operations; it was not until 21 October that renewed efforts against Regina trench (and the adjoining Stuff trench) were possible. II Corps infantry attacked on a 5,000-yard front at 12.06pm, well supported by artillery, and after sharp fighting took all their objectives in just over 30 minutes. The whole of the crest of the ridge was now in British hands.

Canadian attempts on 23 October further to extend their occupation of Regina Trench were frustrated by mud and heavy enemy fire. It was not until 10 November, after days of rain, that a surprise midnight assault finally secured the eastern portion of this position. Next morning, following slight improvements in the weather (allowing some moderate drying of the ground), Gough finally decided that his much-delayed set-piece offensive would begin on Monday 13 November.


[<http://www.cwgc.org/somme/>]

A few details appeared in the *Chester Chronicle* report of William's death:

ROLL OF HONOUR.

PTE. CROFTS, OF PUDDINGTON, KILLED.

News has been received of the death of Pte. William Crofts on November 8th. The sad news was conveyed in a letter from the chaplain. We learn that his wound was a compound fracture of the right humerus, and he was also suffering from gas. The wound, which was too far into the shoulder to amputate, turned to gas gangrene, thus giving no hope of his recovery, and he succumbed to his injuries. He was buried in Boulogne Cemetery. He was well-known, and had many friends in the district, where he resided before joining the colours, and was most highly esteemed by all who knew him, and the news of his death was received with great regret. He was an only son, and his sisters are engaged at the Rectory, Hawarden. Before enlisting he was employed as under game-



keeper by Mr. S. Sanday, Puddington Hall. He was one of those who were prompt and willing to serve, and the week after war broke out with four of his pals, he joined up. It is sad to think that of this brave little band he is the third to give his life for his country, though their gallantry commands the admiration of all. He was 16 months with the Cheshires in France. His loss is keenly felt by all who knew him, and the greatest sympathy is felt for his relatives and friends in their great loss. The deceased soldier's sisters received a letter from the chaplain, in which he says:—"Before passing away he asked me to write you all, and give you his love. We had a most beautiful celebration of the Holy Communion together a few hours before he passed away. He was wonderfully brave and patient, and never murmured, and to you all he sent his dear love. He will be laid to rest to-morrow in the military cemetery, Boulogne. The doctors and nurses were unsparing in their attention. May the Holy Spirit be with you to strengthen and comfort you in your great sorrow.

Chester Chronicle - Saturday
18 November 1916

However, there is little clarity as to the events surrounding Thomas William Crofts involvement with the 9th Battalion at the time of his death as, describing the securing of the German trenches and the taking of the high ground, it is noted that:

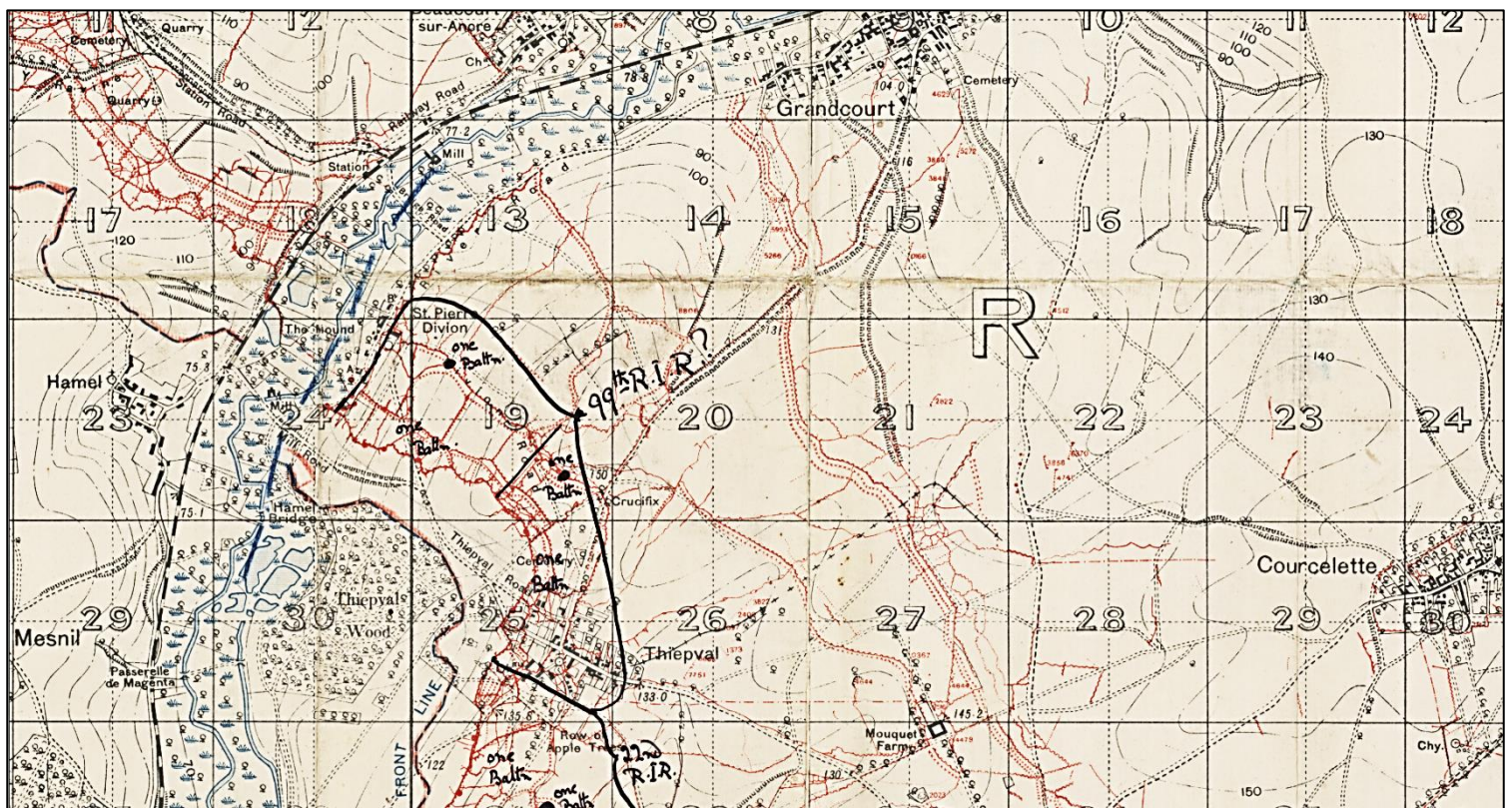
Our 9th Battalion also earned this honour by being in the area at the end of October and 1st November. But beyond the fact that the mud was "thigh deep," no mention is made of any action in their own or the Brigade War Diary. In fact, their Brigade-Major (*not* Major Adair, who by now had become G.S.O. 2) hardly records any movements, except his own, in the Brigade War Diary.

[The History of the Cheshire Regiment in the Great War : 1914 – 1918 Arthur Crookenden, Colonel of the Regiment WH Evans, Sons & Co. Ltd. 1938]

During the night of 22 October, the 19th Division relieved the 25th Division and part of the 39th Division sector and the 18th Division moved its left boundary to the Pozieres–Miraumont road. Prisoners were still being found and by the end of the day 1,057 had been taken. Next day, a battalion of the 4th Canadian Division tried to advance along Regina Trench towards Farmer Road but were stopped by flanking machine-gun fire and a German artillery bombardment. On 26 October, the 19th Division drove off a German attack on Stuff Redoubt at 5:00 a.m. On 28 October the Special Brigade R. E. fired 1,126 "SK" (lacrymatory) 4-inch Stokes mortar bombs into Beaumont Hamel, 135 40-pound (18 kg) phosgene bombs into the village and Y Ravine nearby and thirty 2-inch White Star (50 percent chlorine: 50 percent phosgene) mortar bombs into Serre.

Vigorous raiding and patrolling began on the north bank of the Ancre. On 29 October the 39th Division took more ground at Pope's Nose, before bad weather stopped operations in II Corps on the south bank, until the night of 10/11 November. A patrol from troops of XIII Corps on the north bank entered the German front-line near Hébuterne on 31 October and found it empty and a raid by the 30th Division killed 30 Germans on 7 November. Mud prevented movement on 9 and 10 November and in II Corps another gas bombardment on Beaumont Hamel took place on 11 November. 180 lacrymatory bombs were fired from 4-inch Stokes mortars at 5:00 a.m. and at 3:0 p.m. 47 gas drums were fired into the village and 37 more fired at Y Ravine. At midnight two 10th Brigade battalions and a company from an 11th Brigade battalion of the 4th Canadian Division, attacked the east end of Regina Trench and established advanced posts to the north-east, close to the German positions of the Le Sars–Pys line, before defeating several counter-attacks. The Battle of the Ancre began on 13 November with more attacks by II Corps on the south bank, combined with attacks from V Corps and XIII Corps on the north bank. [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Ancre_Heights]

This brief account of the action around the time when William Crofts was injured, and subsequently died, notes the significant use of gas shells.



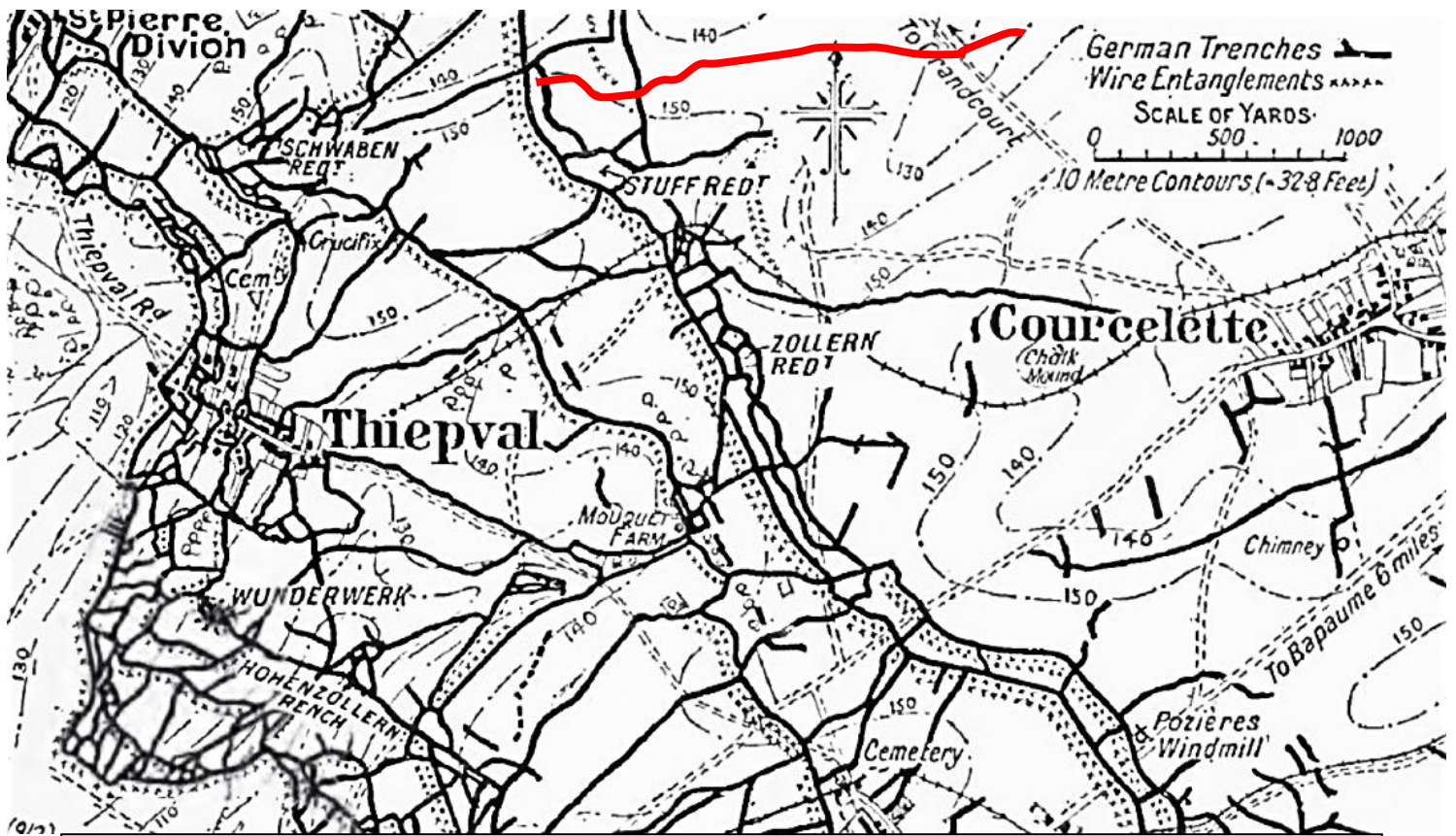
↑ British front line 1 mile

Military map of late-April 1916 showing the area between, and to the north of, Thiepval and Courcelette where the Battle of Ancre Heights was fought later in the year. As the map shows clearly, the British front line in April lay to the west of Thiepval and to the east of the broad and marshy Ancre Valley. The red lines on this map indicate the German-held trenches and other defences.

[Source: <http://digitalarchive.mcmaster.ca/islandora/object/macrepo%3A70684>]

Much of the action took place around Regina Trench Stuff Redoubt and Schwaben Redoubt and it was probable that it was in this immediate vicinity that William Crofts was injured and gassed. Regina Trench was a German trench dug along a ridge running

from north-west of the village of Le Sars, south-west to Stuff Redoubt and it was the longest trench of its type on the front line during the war.



Map of German defensive fortifications from Thiepval to Courcellette, July 1916. The map shows the location of Regina Trench (only the western section), Stuff Redoubt and Schwaben Redoubt (north of Thiepval).

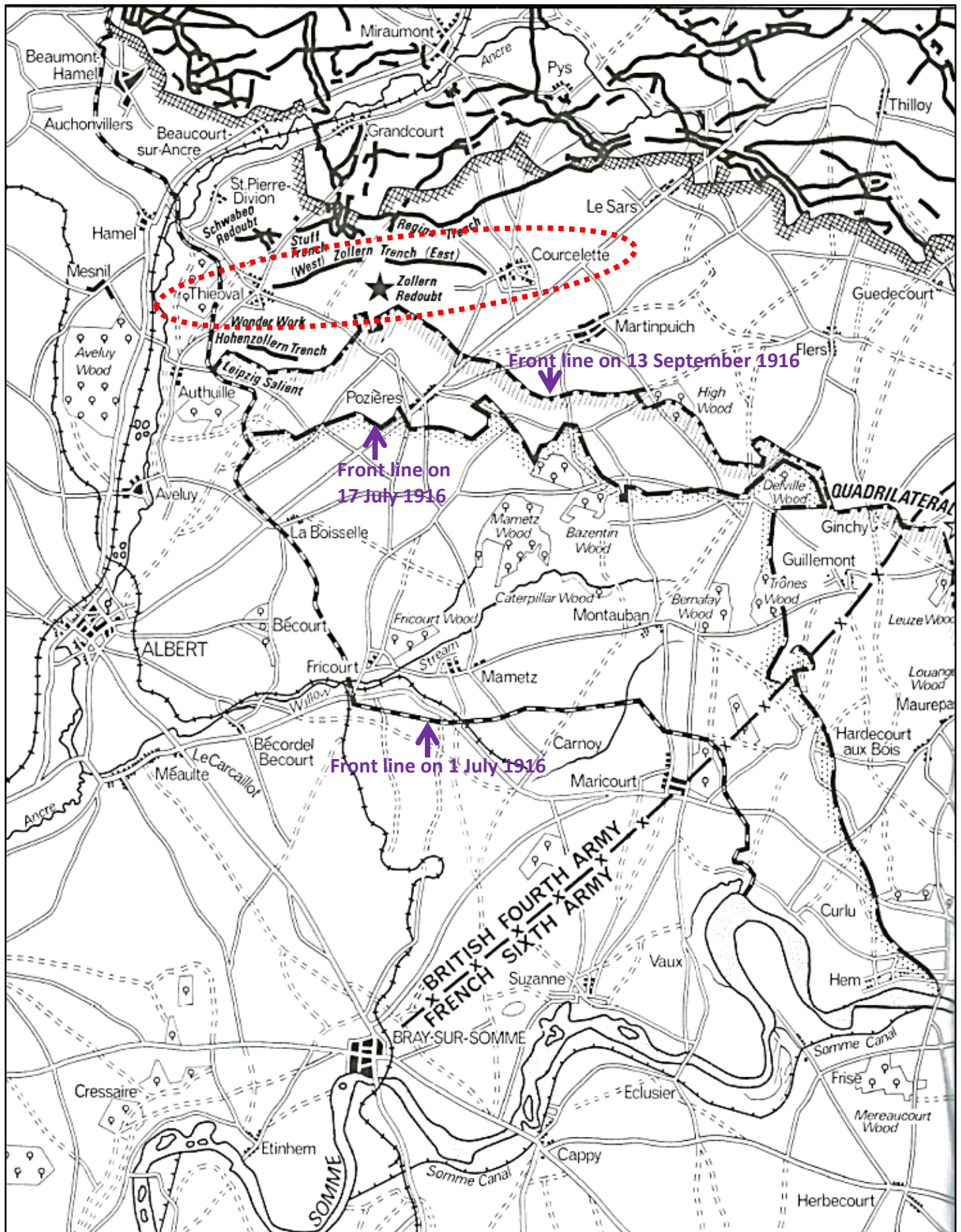
[Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_Stuff_Redoubt]

410645	2/325863	Crofts	9 th Athn	5-11-16	Shrawsbury	3 10 10	3 10 10	P.O.B. 7	7.3.17	Fa: William	3 10 10										
		Thomas William	Cheshire Pte	1/14	1/14																
			11420						14/10/1917	Jacob William	9 10 -										
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Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

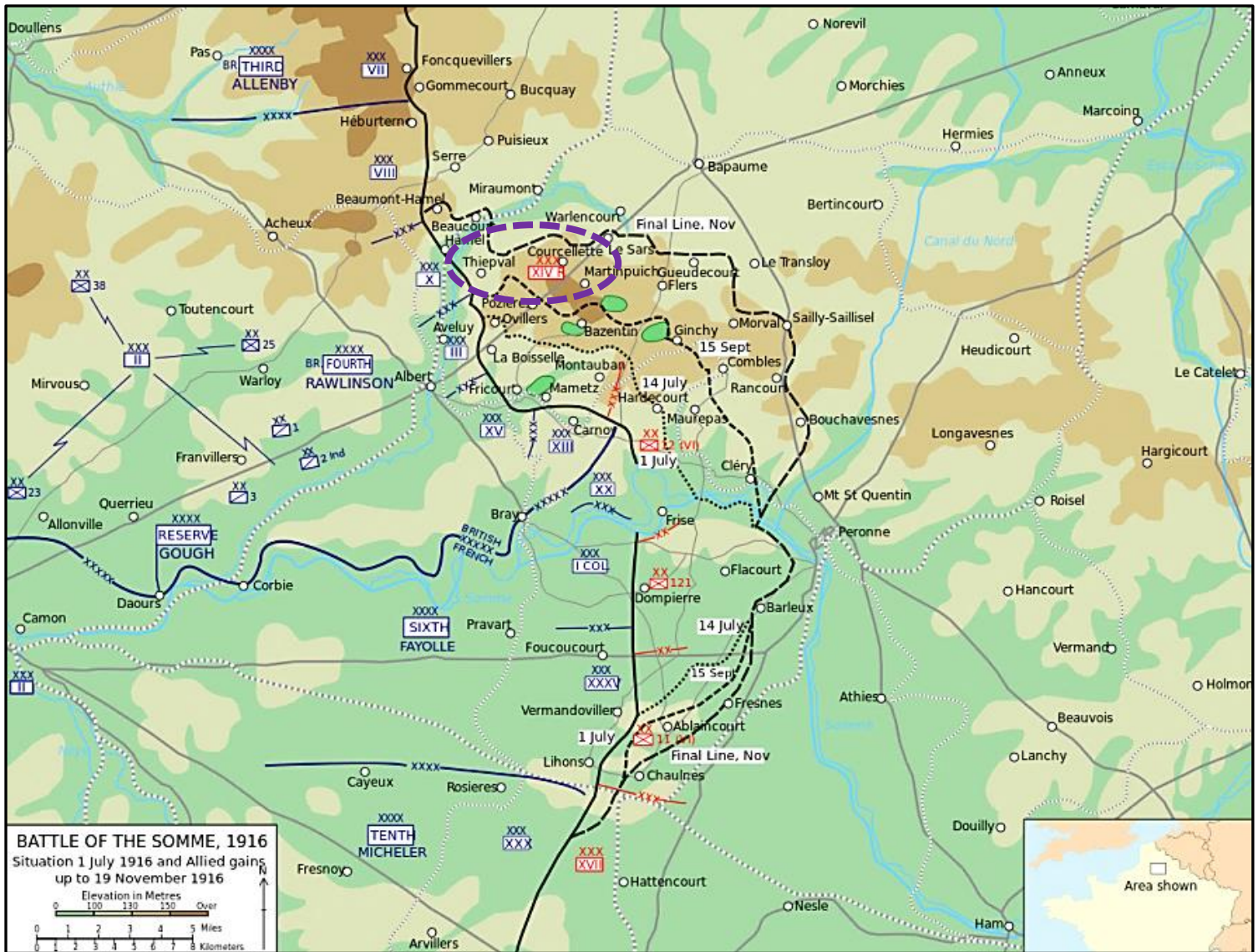
In Summer 1919 the army paid outstanding credits – mainly remaining wages – to soldiers or, in the case of those who had died, their family or nominated representatives. At the same time a War Gratuity was often paid. In June 1919 Thomas' father William received a payment of outstanding wages of £3 10s 10d from the army and, in October, a War Gratuity of £9 10s. This, a total value of £13 0s 10d, is equivalent to a *labour value* (wages) of around £2000 in 2016.

The War Gratuity was introduced in December 1918 as a payment to be made to those men who had served in WW1 for a period of 6 months or more home service or for any length of service if a man had served overseas. The rules governing the gratuity were implemented under Army Order 17 of 1919 but the amount paid was related to the length of war service.



Thomas William Crofts is believed to have been injured in the area of Thiepval & Courcelette, outlined in red on this map

[Source: *A Military Atlas of the First World War* Arthur Banks Leo Cooper (an imprint of Pen & Sword Books) 2001 (The map shown here is the western half of the map in the book)]



Generalised map showing the eastward movement of the front line around the Somme from 1 July to 19 November 1916. The area in which the 19th (Western) Division was located at this time has been encircled in purple. [Source: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_the_Ancre_Heights]

Following his injuries Thomas William Crofts would have been taken through the medical chain to one of the several military hospitals on the French coast around Boulogne and Wimereux. It was here that he died on 5 November 1916 and was buried in the vicinity at the Boulogne Eastern Cemetery.

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
<i>CROFTS.</i>	<i>Ches</i>	<i>M.</i>	<i>PLC</i>
<i>Thomas W.</i>			<i>11720</i>
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
<i>VICTORY</i>	<i>J/2/101 B5</i>	<i>1332</i>	<i>D/W. 5/11/16.</i>
<i>BRITISH</i>	<i>-D-</i>	<i>-D-</i>	
<i>15 STAR</i>	<i>J/2/1 B5</i>	<i>429</i>	
Theatre of War first served in	<i>(15) France</i>		
Date of entry therein	<i>19/7/15</i>		

IN MEMORIAM.
 CROFTS.—In ever loving memory of our dear
 brother (Billy), who died from wounds received
 in action November 5th, 1916.
 Fondly remembered by father and sisters.
 The Lodge, Puddington.

Chester Chronicle - Saturday 2 November 1918



Transcription of family gravestone at St Nicholas' Church, Burton

In Loving Memory of
 Hannah
 Beloved Wife of
 William Crofts
 Of Puddington
 Who Died Novr. 25th 1915
 Aged 58 Years

'Her End Was Peace'

Also of Private T. William Crofts
 Cheshire Regiment: *Son of the Above*
 Who Died of Wounds Received in
 France

Novr. 5th 1916, Aged 21 Years

'Greater Love Hath No Man Than This.

*That A Man Lay Down His Life
 For His Friend'*

Also William Crofts

Beloved Husband of the Above
 Died 5th Feb. 1945 Aged 90 Years
 At Rest