

# 166: Ernest James Thelwell

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Ernest James Thelwell

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: King's Coy. 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Grenadier Guards

Service Number: 23178      Date of Death: 25 September 1916      Age at Death: 25

Buried / Commemorated at: Thiepval Memorial, Thiepval, Departement de la Somme, Picardie, France

Additional information given by CWGC: Son of James and Catherine Thelwell, of 38, Overleigh Rd., Chester.

Ernest James Thelwell was the eldest son of Police Constable James and Catherine Thelwell and he was born on 22 March 1892 when his parents were living in Eastham.

James Thelwell (a son of agricultural labourer William and Sarah Thelwell) married Catherine Jones (a daughter of Thomas) at St Mary's Church, Edge Hill, Liverpool in late 1889 and their first child, Dora Elizabeth, was born in late 1890 when James was a constable in Woodchurch. In the 1891 census the family was still recorded in Woodchurch:

Administrative County of <i>Cheshire</i>		The undermentioned Houses are situate within the Boundaries of the										Page 1			
Civil Parish of <i>Urrhoe</i>		Municipal Borough of <i>Urrhoe</i>		Municipal Ward of <i>Urrhoe</i>		Urban Sanitary District of <i>Urrhoe</i>		Town or Village or Hamlet of <i>Urrhoe</i>		Rural Sanitary District of <i>Urrhoe</i>	Parliamentary Borough or Division of <i>Urrhoe</i>	Ecclesiastical Parish or District of <i>Woodchurch</i>			
Col. 1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16
No. of Schedule	ROAD, STREET, &c., and No. or NAME of HOUSE	No. of HOUSES	Number of HOUSES (U.S. or (R.))	NAME and Surname of each Person	RELATION to Head of Family	CON-DITION as to Marriage	AGE last Birth-day of	Male	Female	PROFESSION or OCCUPATION	Employer	Employed	Employed	WHERE BORN	(1) Deaf-and-Dumb (2) Blind (3) Lunatic, Imbecile or Idiot
1	<i>Upton Road</i>	1		<i>James Thelwell</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>27</i>			<i>Police Constable</i>		<i>X</i>		<i>Malpas</i>	
				<i>Catherine Thelwell</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>27</i>							<i>Denbigh</i>	
				<i>Dora</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>6 months</i>							<i>Woodchurch</i>	

1901 census (extract) – Upton Road, Woodchurch, Birkenhead

James Thelwell	27	police constable	born Malpas
Catherine	27		born Denbigh
Dora	6 months		born Woodchurch

By the time of the 1901 census the family had moved to Neston where James was a policeman. It appears that James left the police force in Birkenhead to join the constabulary in Eastham shortly after the 1891 census and he remained there until (probably) mid-1897.

<i>James Thelwell</i>	<i>Head</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>38</i>	<i>Police Constable</i>	<i>Malpas</i>
<i>Catherine Thelwell</i>	<i>Wife</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>38</i>		<i>Denbigh</i>
<i>Dora Thelwell</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>10</i>		<i>Cheshire</i>
<i>Ernest</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>9</i>		<i>Eastham</i>
<i>William</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>7</i>		<i>Eastham</i>
<i>Ruth</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>6</i>		<i>Eastham</i>
<i>Gwenyth</i>	<i>Daughter</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>5</i>		<i>Eastham</i>
<i>Charles</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>3</i>		<i>Neston</i>
<i>Henry</i>	<i>Son</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>2 months</i>		<i>Neston</i>

1901 census (extract) – Parkgate Road, Neston

James Thelwell	38	police constable	born Malpas
Catherine	38		born Denbigh
Dora	10		born Chester
Ernest	9		born Eastham
William	7		born Eastham
Ruth	6		born Eastham
Gwenyth	5		born Eastham
Charles	3		born Neston
Henry	2 months		born Neston

Although the census records that Dora Elizabeth was born in Chester it is known that she was born in Woodchurch. Additionally, although the census records that Charles Thelwell (his birth, in late 1897, was registered as Charles Colin) was born in Neston no record of his baptism here has been found and the 1911 census notes that he was born in Eastham. William Thomas Thelwell, the second son, was born in late 1893 and it is believed that he died, aged 13, in late 1906. Henry, the last child to be born to James and Catherine, was born in early 1901 and he was baptised at Neston Parish Church on 15 February 1901.

In February 1904 it was reported that James Thelwell was being moved to the police force in Higher Bebington and it was noted that he had been stationed in Neston between six and seven years - this suggests that he came to Neston in about August 1897 when Ernest would have been 5½. When the family moved to Bebington Ernest would have been almost

**A POPULAR OFFICIAL.**—Constable James Thelwell, who has been stationed at Neston between six and seven years, is being removed to Higher Bebington. During the long period he has been stationed here he has shewn himself a smart, intelligent and courteous officer, and very general regret is expressed that he is about to sever his connection with the district. It is probable that the local public will shew their appreciation in a practical fashion.

12 and so his younger schooldays would have been spent in Neston.

It is not certain how long the family spent in Bebington but, at the 1911 census, they were in Pulford between Chester and Wrexham:

Certainly, they were in that district in October 1908 when a newspaper report noted that James investigated a suspicious death at Tilston, near Malpas.

*The Chester Courant and Advertiser for North Wales*  
- 17 February 1904

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.												
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, or 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.
1 James Thelwell	head	48	Married	22	7	6	1	Police Constable	Malpas, Cheshire			
2 Catherine Thelwell	wife	45	Married	22	7	6	1		Denbigh	1855		
3 Ernest Thelwell	son	19	Single					Forester's Labourer	Woodchurch, Cheshire			
4 Ruth Thelwell	daughter	16	Single						Eastham, Cheshire			
5 Gwenyth Thelwell	daughter	15	Single						Eastham, Cheshire			
6 Colin Thelwell	son	13	Single					School	Eastham, Cheshire			
7 Henry Thelwell	son	10	Single					School	Neston, Cheshire			

1911 census (condensed) – Pulford, nr. Wrexham

James Thelwell	48	police constable	born Malpas
Catherine	48		born Denbigh
Ernest	19	forester's labourer	born Woodchurch
		(Eaton Estate Works)	
Ruth	16	dress maker	born Eastham
Gwenyth	15	assist. house work	born Eastham
Colin	13		born Eastham
Henry	10		born Neston

James and Catherine had been married for 22 years and six of their seven children were still alive.

The only member of the family not recorded in the house at Pulford was Ruth - she (now 21, with her birthplace recorded as Woodchurch) was a housemaid to an elderly widow, Margaret Pickmere, at Thelwall near Warrington.

In the 1911 census Ernest is shown as a forester's labourer on the Eaton Estate, now (2018) *part of the Grosvenor Estate and is a private owned organisation. It includes the thriving villages of Aldford, Eccleston, Saughton as well as parts of the city centre and Handbridge. It contains some 435 homes, 15 farms and 72 commercial units, four schools and over 10,000 acres of high quality agricultural land in Cheshire, North West England.*  
*The history of the Eaton Estate can be traced back to the early 1440s. At its heart sits Eaton Hall, the home of the Duke of Westminster and the Duchess of Westminster and the Grosvenor family.*  
[<https://www.eatonestate.co.uk/>]

However, it is known that Ernest followed in his father's footsteps and joined the police force on 22 March 1913 serving initially at Dukinfield and later at Bramhall near Stockport.

In March 1915 Ernest enlisted in Chester in the King's Company (as the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion was named) of the Grenadier Guards and, just a few months later, his father retired from the police force having completed 27 years of service; he would then have been aged about 51½. Unfortunately, Ernest's Service Record does not seem to have survived.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Grenadier Guards, part of the 20<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 7<sup>th</sup> Division, had been mobilised for war on 7 October 1914. Having landed at Zeebrugge the Division engaged in various actions on the Western Front including The First Battle of Ypres after which only 4 officers and 200 men remained of the Battalion.

On 4 August 1915 the Battalion transferred to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guards Brigade of the Guards Division and were engaged in various action on the Western Front including, in 1916, The Battle of Flers-Courcelette and The Battle of Morval, a precursor to The Battle of Thiepval (26 - 28 September). It was on the first day of The Battle of Morval, which lasted from 25 - 28 September, that Ernest Thelwell was killed in action <sup>1</sup>.

The Battle of Morval was an attack during The Battle of the Somme by the British Fourth Army on the villages of Morval, Gueudecourt and Lesbœufs held by the German 1<sup>st</sup> Army, which had been the final objectives of The Battle of Flers-Courcelette (15 - 22 September) <sup>2</sup>. The main British attack was postponed, to combine with attacks by the French Sixth Army on the village of Combles south of Morval, to close up to the German defences between Moislains and Le Transloy, near the Péronne-Bapaume road (N 17). The combined attack from the Somme river northwards to Martinpuich on the Albert-Bapaume road, was also intended to deprive the German defenders further west near Thiepval of reinforcements, before an attack by the Reserve Army, due on 26 September.

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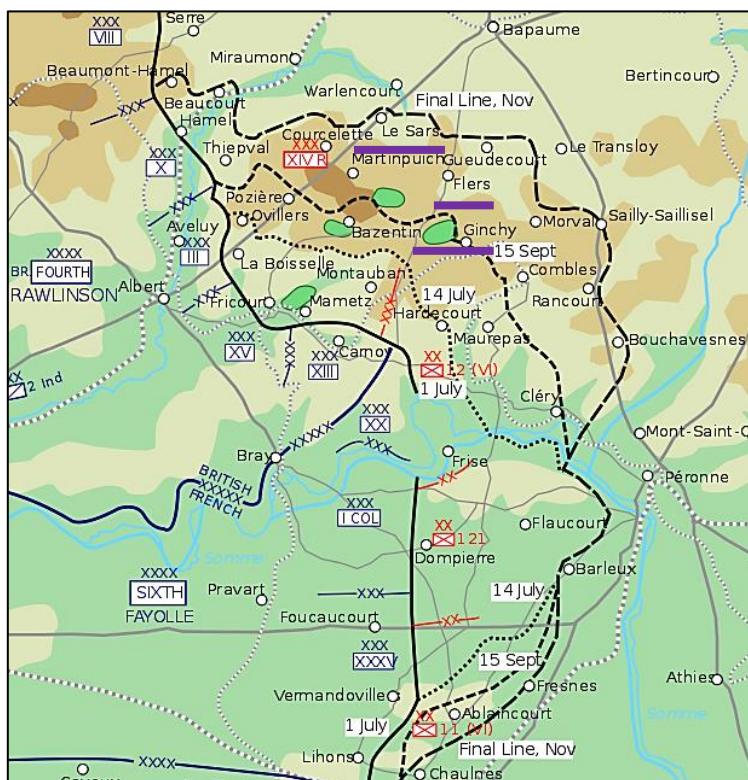
<sup>1</sup> The Guards Division was in the XIV Corps under the command of Field Marshal Frederick Rudolph Lambert, 10<sup>th</sup> Earl of Cavan, in the Fourth Army (Sir Henry Rawlinson).

<sup>2</sup> Flers-Courcelette, which saw the first use of tanks on the battlefield, was a qualified British success. The British advanced 2,500 yd (2,300 m) and at Flers got forward 3,500 yd (3,200 m). The German defence had almost collapsed and the British captured 4,500 yd (4,100 m) of the third position, taking about double the amount of ground taken on 1 July for about half the casualties. Following this conflict the British Expeditionary Force commander-in-chief, Sir Douglas Haig, remained determined to break through the German lines at the Somme. [Wikipedia]

The postponement was extended from 21 - 25 September because of rain, which affected operations more frequently during September.

Combles, Morval, Lesbœufs and Gueudecourt were captured and many casualties inflicted on the Germans. The French made slower progress near the inter-army boundary, due to the obstruction of St Pierre Vaast Wood to the French attack north towards Saily and Saily-Saillisel. The inter-army boundary was moved north from 27 - 28 September, to allow the French more room to deploy their forces but the great quantity of German artillery-fire limited the French advance. The Fourth Army advance on 25 September was its deepest since 14 July and left the Germans in severe difficulties, particularly in a salient which developed to the north-east of Combles. Tiredness and lack of reserves prevented the Fourth Army exploiting its success beyond patrolling and cavalry probes. The Reserve Army attack began on 26 September, at the Battle of Thiepval Ridge. Deteriorating weather and the shorter days, greatly increased British and French transport difficulties; rain and fog grounded aircraft and impeded artillery observation. Mud reduced the blast effect of shells and immobilised infantry, which was an advantage to the defenders. A small number of tanks joined in the battle later in the afternoon, after having been held back because of the later start and reduced a number of German strong points which had withstood earlier attacks. [[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Morval](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Morval)]

In fact the attack at Morval wasn't intended to deliver a significant breakthrough but its primary goal was to even up the lines by capturing objectives left unattained during the Battle of Flers-Courcelette, as well as tie down German forces in preparation for the main attack by the Reserve Army (later Fifth Army), set to begin the following day at Thiepval Ridge, about seven miles to the west.



By 15 September Allied forces had pushed the front line eastwards from Ovillers, south of Thiepval, to Chaulnes creating a salient (shown by the dashed line).

The objective at The Battle of Morval was to extend and straighten this line – the villages capture during this battle have been underlined in purple (Lesbœufs is located between Morval and Gueudecourt).

[[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle\\_of\\_Morval](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Morval)]

Details of the preparations made by the Guards Brigade before The Battle of Morval are described in *The Grenadier Guards in the Great War of 1914-1918 v2*

[Sir Frederick Edward Grey Ponsonby, Baron Sysonby, 1920]:

*At the end of August the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guards Brigade [which included the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion] went through a period of training which lasted until September 7<sup>th</sup>; during this time it stayed in billets at Ville-sous-Corbie.....On the 8<sup>th</sup> the Brigade moved up into the line and took over*

Ginchy, which had just been captured by the 16<sup>th</sup> Division. The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Grenadiers and 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Welsh Guards were placed in the first trenches, while the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Grenadiers and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Scots Guards were in reserve.<sup>3</sup>

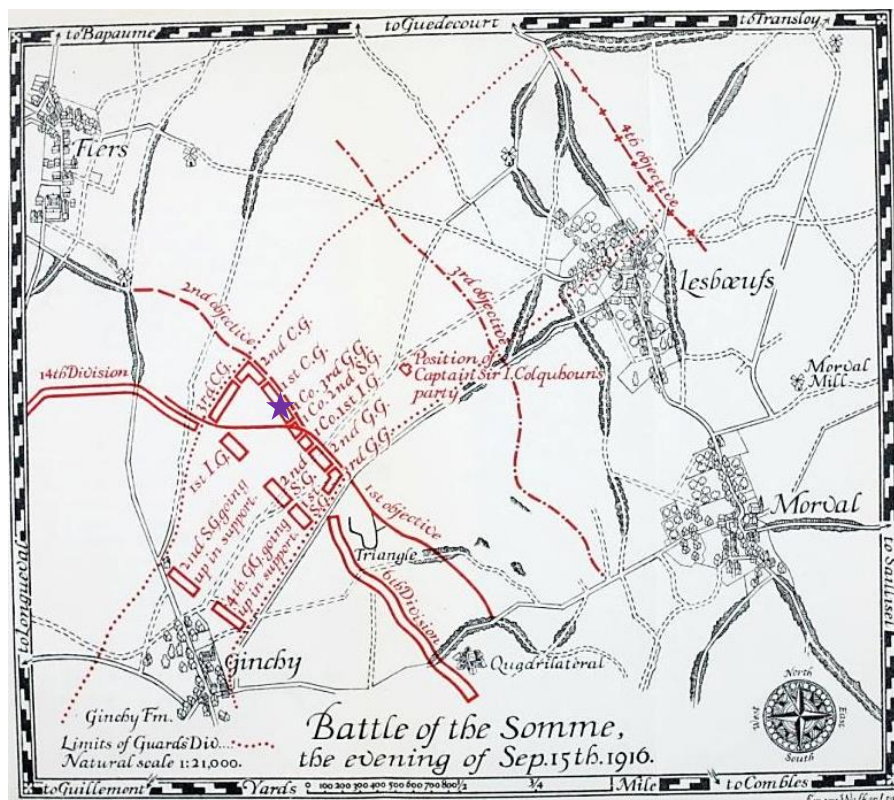
On 10 - 11 September the Guards Brigade was put under attack and the King's Company, which had been held in reserve, was moved into the front line to fill gaps left by the casualties; although they suffered their own casualties 50 Germans were taken prisoner. On 13 September.....the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion Grenadiers was relieved by 2am by the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Irish Guards, and went into camp at Happy Valley<sup>4</sup>.

That afternoon there was a conference of Commanding Officers, when General Corkran explained the dispositions for the impending attack. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Guards Brigade was to attack on the 15<sup>th</sup>, while the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guards Brigade would be in reserve.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> the 1st Battalion Grenadiers marched to Carnoy and then to Trônes Wood, where it spent the night huddled together in shell-holes. It was so bitterly cold that it was difficult to get any sleep, and next morning every one was chilled to the bone. The "wood" consisted of trunks of trees blackened by shell-fire, the upper parts having been shot away; they were quite leafless, and the splintered branches lay all tangled over the shell craters. Amongst the wreckage were shapeless bodies in khaki and grey; some almost skeletons, and others with the skin stretched over the bones and tanned like leather. Flying about among the bare trees were half-a-dozen magpies, the only occupants of the wood. All was quiet, when suddenly our barrage began, followed by the German one, and soon the noise was terrific.

With the rest of the 3<sup>rd</sup> Guards Brigade, the 1st Battalion Grenadiers advanced to a position south-west of Ginchy in artillery formation, and proceeded to strengthen the line of trenches there. The Brigade was to support the attack of the other two brigades, or to counter any hostile movements against the right flank of the Division, which was in the air, as the Sixth Division had been held up by the Quadrilateral. The 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion Grenadiers and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion Scots Guards accordingly moved up to a position about half-a-mile north of Ginchy, while the 1st Battalion Grenadiers and 1st Battalion Welsh Guards took their places south-west of that village, and were employed most of the day in supplying carrying parties for the other two brigades.

Second Lieutenant L. G. E. Sim and 100 men of No. 3 Company did particularly good work in carrying up ammunition and materials under fire to the battalions in the front line of trenches.



Lieutenant Samuelson was sent forward that night by Lieut.-Colonel Maitland to ascertain where the leading line had got to, so that he might know exactly the position occupied by the 1st and 2nd Guards Brigades. After stumbling about for three-quarters of an hour he reached the trench indicated by the guides, but it was deserted except for a few wounded. So he had to push on still farther, and eventually found the front trench occupied by a mixed mass of men of the Guards Division.

Key  
 IG – Irish Guards  
 SG – Scots Guards  
 GG – Grenadier Guards  
 CG – Coldstream Guards  
 ★ Location of the King's Company (1<sup>st</sup> Bn.)

<sup>3</sup> The three officers in command of the King's Company at this time all died in WW1: Captain W. D. Drury-Lowe DSO (killed on 25 September 1916 on the opening day of The Battle of Morval), Lieut. G. F. Pauling (died 25 March 1918) and 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant Gregory Bernard Samuelson (died 27 November 1917).

<sup>4</sup> Happy Valley was a valley south of High Wood and between Longueval and Albert. This was the main supply route during the attempts to advance the line at High Wood. The valley was protected from direct observation from the German lines by the topography of the land, and thousands of men and large numbers of supplies moved along it although it was heavily shelled on numerous occasions.

He reported this to Lieut.-Colonel Maitland, who gave orders for the King's Company under Captain Drury-Lowe, and No. 4 Company under Captain Fisher-Rowe, to advance through Ginchy. There were apparently no guides, and after passing south of Ginchy these two companies advanced towards the front line until they met Lieut.-Colonel Murray-Threipland, who told them there were no unoccupied trenches in front. They therefore returned to their original position, having unluckily lost five N.C.O.'s, who were killed or wounded by a single shell that pitched in their midst.

At 9 A.M. the order came for the 1st Battalion to move up so as to be ready to attack with the rest of the 3rd Guards Brigade. Having joined the other battalion, the 1st Battalion Grenadiers reached a position just behind the starting-point at 11.15 A.M. The 3rd Guards Brigade, with the 1st Battalion Grenadiers on the right, the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards on the left, and the 4th Battalion Grenadiers in support, was ordered to pass through the battalions in the front line and attack the previous day's third objective, or Blue line, but all the Commanding Officers raised a protest against an advance unsupported in any way by artillery fire, and General Corkran reported this back to the Divisional Headquarters.

### 3RD GUARDS BRIGADE

#### *Operation Order, No. 66*

1. The Fourth Army will renew the attack on the 25th Sept. in combination with the attacks by the French in the south and the Reserve Army in the north. The Guards Division will capture Lesbœufs. The 1st Guards Brigade will attack on the right and the 3rd Guards Brigade on the left. The Fifth Division will attack Morval on the right and the Twenty-first Division (62nd Brigade) will attack Gueudecourt on the left of the Guards Division.

2. *Objectives.*—The objectives, assembly trenches, and dividing line between brigades and divisions are marked on attached map.

The first objective Green.  
The second objective Brown.  
The third objective Blue.

The 2nd Batt. Scots Guards and the 4th Batt. Grenadiers will capture the first and second objectives, and will advance in two waves on a front of two companies each. The 2nd Batt. Scots Guards will attack on the right and the 4th Batt. Grenadiers on the left.

The 1st Batt. Grenadiers will pass through the two leading battalions and capture the third objective. The 1st Batt. Welsh Guards, less two companies, will be held in Brigade Reserve in T.S.a.

3. *The Assault.*—The 2nd Batt. Scots Guards and 4th Batt. Grenadiers will be formed up in X and Y trenches, and will advance to the attack of the first objective at zero hour close up to their barrage. There are two hostile lines to cross before the objective is reached, the first being from T.2.b.97 to T.8.b.3.10, and the second in the main German Brown line.

These two battalions will reorganise in the first objective and advance to the attack of the second objective at zero + 1 hour.

The left of the 2nd Batt. Scots Guards will direct. The 1st Batt. Grenadiers will be formed up in Z trench and will advance so as to reach the first objective at zero hour + 1 hour. The Battalion will advance to the attack of the third objective so as to reach their barrage 200 yards beyond the second objective at zero + 2 hours.

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The protest was overruled, and the attack was ordered to begin at once. The 1st Battalion Grenadiers reached the high ground west of Lesbœufs, but was met with heavy machine-gun fire, opened on it from the church tower and other strong points. Second Lieutenant Sim was killed, and Second Lieutenant Samuelson wounded, in addition to some casualties among other ranks.

Orders were given to consolidate the position which had been reached, and the 1st Battalion, having been relieved by the 59th Infantry

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Brigade, returned to bivouacs in Carnoy. On the 18th Major A. F. A. N. Thorne, D.S.O., left to take command of the 3rd Battalion, and Lieutenant C. H. C. Healy and Lieutenant W. J. Dashwood joined.

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On the 20th the 1st Battalion Grenadiers marched to the trenches west of Lesbœufs and remained there till the next day, when it was relieved by the 3rd Battalion Coldstream. Lieutenant Dashwood was wounded while his Company was going into the front line. On the 24th the 1st Battalion left Trônes Wood and marched to the assembly trenches in preparation for the attack next day, for which Brigadier-General Corkran issued the following orders :

Two companies of the 1st Batt. Welsh Guards will be formed up in T.8.a, and will move into X line so as to be ready to occupy the first objective as soon as the 1st Batt. Grenadiers leave that line. In timing their advance to the X line these two companies will seize opportunities offered by any slackening of the hostile barrage.

4. *Consolidation.*—The 4th Batt. Grenadiers and 2nd Batt. Scots Guards will consolidate the second objective. At zero hour + 2 hours the 4th Grenadiers will push a unit forward by the sunken road in N.33.b and d and consolidate a strong point at the northern end, obtaining touch with the 62nd Infantry Brigade. The Battalion will also consolidate a strong point on

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the left of the second objective. The O.C. 2nd Batt. Scots Guards will detail one company to push forward at zero hour + 2 hours on his right flank and consolidate a strong point to protect the right rear of the 1st Batt. Grenadiers against attack from the south.

Two companies of the 1st Batt. Welsh Guards will consolidate the first objective, making a strong point on the left flank of that objective and at N.32.d.8.3, and maintaining touch with the 62nd Infantry Brigade.

In the event of the Brigades on our right and left being held up, defensive flanks will be formed. As soon as the situation demands, half a battalion will be advanced to the sunken road in R.34.a and d.

5. *Preliminary Movement.*—Battalions will be moved up to the assembly positions on the night of the 24/25th September. The 1st Batt. Grenadiers will not move before 10 P.M.

Assaulting battalions will cut any wire in front of our trenches on the night of the 24/25th September. Wire-cutters can be drawn at Guillemont station if required. Units will report when they have reached their assembly positions as detailed above on the night of the 24/25th September; special relief of 1st Batt. Welsh Guards will be arranged direct between O.C. 4th Batt. Grenadiers, 2nd Batt. Scots Guards, and 1st Batt. Welsh Guards.

[The remainder of the orders referred to artillery and transport.]

E. C. WARNER, Captain,  
Brigade-Major, 3rd Guards Brigade.

The Z line referred to in the orders was a narrow trench, about 5 feet deep, a short distance behind the British front line. The first objective, or Green line, was the final German trench running north/south, well in front of the villages.

The second objective, or Brown line, was a sunken road with dug-outs located about 800 yards behind the first objective. The third objective, the Blue line, was about 600 yards further back. Zero hour was fixed for 12.35pm.

Exactly at 12.35 p.m. the assault began, and the 3rd Guards Brigade advanced to the attack with the 2nd Battalion Scots Guards on the right and the 4th Battalion Grenadiers on the left. The first and second objectives were secured with comparatively little loss, considering the strength of the German lines.

With mathematical precision the 1st Battalion started off, and advanced in column of platoons in fours, so as to be close up when the moment arrived for it to pass through the leading battalions at the second objective. The order from right to left was—the King's Company, No. 2, No. 4, and No. 3. The German artillery at once directed a barrage on them with considerable accuracy, causing a number of casualties. Necessarily the advance was slow, but the military precision with which every order was carried out under this shell-fire was truly remarkable. It might have been a Wimbledon field-day, judging by the cool way in which the non-commissioned officers gave their orders, interposed with cautions such as "Steady by the right," etc. And all the while the shells were falling and exploding hideously.

On arrival at the Green line the 1st Battalion had to wait for some time, and spent it in digging itself farther in, pressing into the service some remaining terrified Germans who had been found alive. The men were all eager to get on, and fretted at being left so long in this trench. At last the moment arrived for the Battalion to continue the advance, and again it moved on in a line.

The first two objectives had been taken by the Battalions in front, and the moment had arrived for the 1st Battalion Grenadiers, to which had been entrusted the attack on the third objective and the capture of Lesbœufs, to pass through the front line and continue the advance. It was faced with the usual problem in such attacks—how to guard the flanks of a successful attacking force when the neighbouring division is held up. In this case it was the left flank which remained in the air, and although the 1st Battalion Welsh Guards was forming a protective flank, the 1st

Battalion Grenadiers was subjected to a cruel enfilade fire. Simultaneously on the right the leading battalion of the 1st Guards Brigade was advancing towards the third objective.

The order in which the 1st Battalion attacked was now slightly changed: the King's Company under Captain Drury-Lowe was still on the right, but No. 2 came under Captain Sheppard next, with No. 4 under Lieutenant Lawford in support. No. 3 Company under Lieutenant Swift was nearest to the enfilade fire, and found it necessary to swing to the left, in order to face the machine-guns which were causing so many casualties. Both Lieutenant Swift and Lieutenant Harvard, the only two officers with this company, were wounded, in addition to Lieutenant Flower, and the casualties among other ranks were very heavy.

With the forward progress of the Battalion the menace to the left flank increased, and Captain Sheppard threw back his left flank to protect the advance, but this naturally made it difficult for him to keep pace with the King's Company. No. 4 Company under Lieutenant Lawford was therefore ordered to come up between the King's and No. 2 Companies, and the advance continued in perfect lines, never hesitating for a moment in the face of a terrific fire. Lieutenant Healy was wounded, and Sergeant Brooks, who led No. 14 Platoon, behaved with great coolness and gallantry, although all his men but two were killed or wounded. He himself was not touched in the morning, but later in the afternoon had his right hand and wrist blown off by a shell. Sergeant Martin, who was in charge of a Lewis gun, had all his team knocked out, but borrowed some men from No. 2 Company, and kept his gun in action for the rest of the day. He was afterwards awarded the D.C.M.

As the King's Company advanced and took the third objective, its Commander, Captain Drury-Lowe, was killed by a shell, while he was consulting Captain Hargreaves of the Irish Guards. He had already gained the D.S.O. in the artillery battery, in which he had fought all through the first years of the war, and would no doubt have earned further distinction had he lived, for he was a man without fear and a worthy commander of the King's Company. Lieutenant P. M. Spence took command, and directly the Blue line had been secured, ordered the men to dig themselves in, which they did, in a narrow and deep trench.

In order to protect the left flank, General Corkran sent up two companies of the Welsh Guards to watch the left of the Division, and as soon as these arrived No. 3 Company of the 1st Battalion Grenadiers under Lieutenant Pauling, who had been sent up to take charge of this Company, now without officers, was once more free to join the rest of the Battalion. When it reached the front line it was ordered to form a strong point 400 yards in front of the junction of No. 2 and No. 4 Companies. Strong patrols were sent out to deal with any of the enemy's snipers who might still be lurking about in front, and they continued their search well into the night. One patrol under Sergeant Carter did particularly well, and managed to secure a German map showing all their dispositions. Application was made that evening to the Guards Division Headquarters for the cavalry to come through, but this was refused on reference to Lord Cavan, on the ground that the situation on the flanks of the Division was still very uncertain.

On the 26th the Germans shelled Lesbœufs with their heavy guns, but the trenches that had been dug were good and little harm was done. No counter-attack was made by the enemy, and that night the 1st Battalion Grenadiers was relieved by the 1st Battalion Scots Guards, and returned to bivouacs at Carnoy.

The total casualties in the 1st Battalion during the consolidation of Ginchy and the two attacks were: officers, killed 4, wounded 12, total 16; other ranks, killed 80, wounded 431, missing 84, total 595.

On the 26th Lieut.-General the Earl of Cavan sent the following message to Major-General G. Feilding :

Please convey to the Guards Division my thanks and admiration for the excellent manner in which they carried out their attacks to-day.

A fortnight later General Sir H. Rawlinson conveyed his appreciation of the part taken by the Guards Division in the battle in the following message :

It is only since the reports have come in that it has become clear that the gallantry and perseverance of the Guards Division in the battles of the 15th and 25th September were paramount factors in the success of the operations of the Fourth Army on those days.

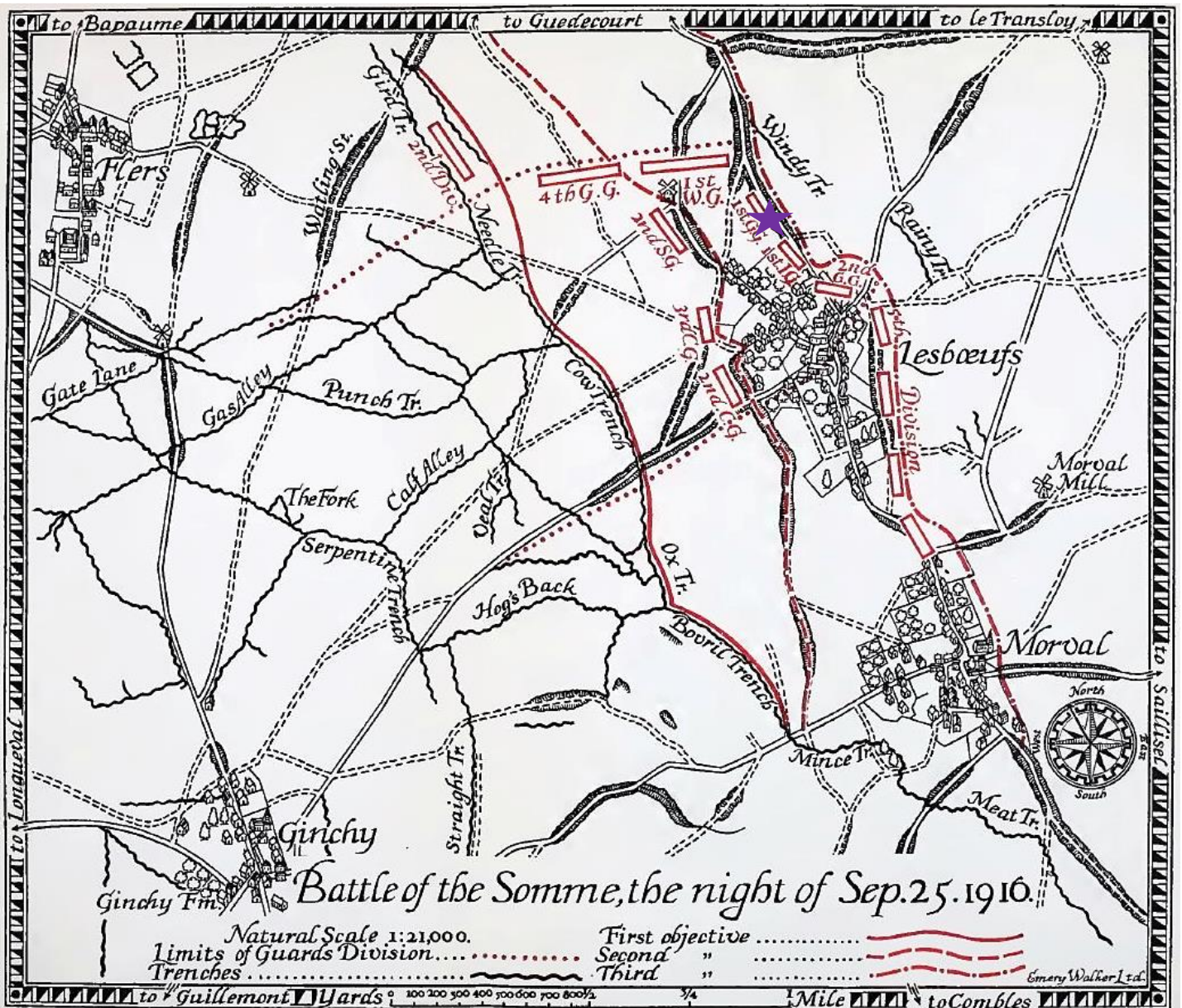
On the 15th September especially, the vigorous

attacks of the Guards, in circumstances of great difficulty, with both flanks exposed to the enfilade fire of the enemy, reflects the highest credit on all concerned, and I desire to tender to every officer, N.C.O., and man my congratulations and best thanks for their exemplary valour on that occasion. Their success established the battle front of the Fourteenth Corps well forward on the high ridge leading towards Morval and Lesbœufs, and made the assault of these villages on the 25th a feasible operation.

On the 25th September, the attack of the hostile trenches in front and north of Lesbœufs was conducted with equal gallantry and determination. In this attack the Division gained all the objectives allotted to them, and I offer to all concerned my warmest thanks and gratitude for their fine performance.

H. RAWLINSON,  
General Commanding Fourth Army.

*The attack on the 25<sup>th</sup>, with the subsequent capture of Lesbœufs, formed one of the most successful operations in which the Guards Division was engaged in the war. The preparation seems to have been complete, and every possible contingency foreseen.*



This map shows the eastern advance made by the Guards Division on 25 September 1916 and the control of Lesbœufs and Morval. ★ The position of the King's Company (1<sup>st</sup> Battalion), north of Lesbœufs.

[The text above, including the extracts in italics, and the two maps are from:  
*The Grenadier Guards in the Great War of 1914-1918* vol. 2 Sir Frederick Edward Grey Ponsonby 1920 Macmillan and Company Ltd.]



The War Diary of the King's Company, Grenadier Guards, for September 1916 gives some additional details although Ernest Thelwell is not named (the Diary is faint and difficult to read in part and some words, shown by [?], are unclear:

*1 Battn. Gren. Gds.*

*Sept. 1916*

*1 - 8 In Billets in VILLE SOUS CORBIE - carried out Comp. & Battn. training Capt. E Sheppard joined 3.9.16 and 2 O.R. on 4.9.16.*

*9 Moved to BERNAFAY WOOD stopping 2 hours N.E. of CARNOY Moved up in Battn. order from CARNOY.*

*10 7.0am N<sup>o</sup>. 2 moved up to ARROW HEAD COPSE in support of 4 Battn. [?] [?] on R of Brigade. At 9.0am N<sup>o</sup>. 3 moved into front lines E of GINCHY relieving elements of 16<sup>th</sup> Div. coming under orders of O.C. 1 Battn. Welsh Gds. at 2.0pm. Remainder of Battn. was sent up to GUILLIMONT under orders of O.C. 1 Battn. Welsh Gds. N<sup>o</sup>. 3 having attacked 9.35pm - 12.50am 11 Sept. and driven off with heavy loss to the Enemy. King's Comp. & N<sup>o</sup>. 4 arrived into the front line N of GINCHY.*

*11 N<sup>o</sup>. 2 Comp. came under [?] orders to attack Strong Point T.14.d.9.5 and occupy line of trench GINCHY TELEGRAPH. N<sup>o</sup>. 4 Comp. crossed in to support. O.C. 1 Battn. took our R sub [?] - N<sup>o</sup>. 2 Comp. moved to attack at 12.0am.*

*12 No. 4 Comp. ordered to support No. 2 & prolong the line. 1 Comp. 4 Battn. came under [?] orders. 10.0am N<sup>o</sup>. 2 found their lines and advanced to within 100 yds of Strong Point. Confirmed they will hold [?]. Capt. Graham was killed by a shell at 4.20pm, Lt. A Cally(?) by a bullet. Battalions made a further attack at 6.0pm but failed to advance and had to throw their R flank south to make good. Relieved by 2 Battn. Irish Gds.*

*13 Battalion went to camp in Happy Valley N of BRAY. Wounded - [?] King, Skelly, Storton, Stein, Sharp & Llewellyn.*

*14 In camp. At 5pm the Battn. marched to CARNOY and had supper. At 10pm it marched to trenches in TRONES WOOD.*

*15 Guards Division attack, zero hour 6.20am, 3<sup>rd</sup> Gds. Brigade in support. The Battn. advanced to GUILLEMONT station in [?] at 9am, at 12.30 advanced to trenches SW edge of GINCHY and provided carrying parties for the [?] Brigade for the rest of the day.*

*16 At 9am Battn. advanced to trenches T.7.d.7.7 at 1.30pm the Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Battn. on right, Welsh Guards on left and 4<sup>th</sup> Battn. in support. Advanced to attack LES BOEUFS without artillery or support.*

*23 Continued digging Z line.*

*24 At 11pm the Battn. moved into the Z line preparatory to attack.*

*25 Guards Division attack, 1<sup>st</sup> Gds. Brigade on R, 3<sup>rd</sup> Gds. Brigade left, 62 Inf. Brigade on left of Division. Zero hour 12.35pm. 2<sup>nd</sup> Battn. Scots Gd. R & 4<sup>th</sup> Battn. Grn. Gds. left attacked and captured 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> objectives. At 2.35pm 1<sup>st</sup> Battn. passed through the Battn. and captured 3<sup>rd</sup> objective by 3.30pm connecting with 1<sup>st</sup> Gds. Brigade on the right, but owing to the 62<sup>nd</sup> Inf. Brigade being held up on the left N<sup>o</sup>. 2 Coy. of the Welsh Gds. formed a defensive flank to the north. Capt. [?] [?] killed, Pts. Swift, Hannah, Flower, Healey wounded. Lts. Carry & Gordon Penrose joined the Battn.*

*26 Line reorganised & consolidated during night of 25/26, King's on the right, N<sup>o</sup>. 4 in centre, No. 2 on left, No. 3 forming strong point in front of left-centre, No. 34 a.1.7.*

*Order of Battle: Kg, 2, 3, from rt. to lt., N<sup>o</sup>. 4, supply platoon & two MGs in support.*

*Hun thoroughly demolished.*

*Relieved by 1<sup>st</sup> Bn. Scots Gd. And returned to CARNOY arriving 3am the 27<sup>th</sup>.*

The War Diary entries for this section conclude with details of the casualties sustained by the unit between 15 – 26 September 1916:

Total Casualties since the 15 Sept				
	Killed	Wounded	Missing	Total
Officers	4	12	-	16
Kings O R	16	103	15	134
N <sup>o</sup> 2 O R	20	90	24	134
N <sup>o</sup> 3 O R	25	107	13	145
N <sup>o</sup> 4 O R	19	131	32	182
Total	84	443	84	611

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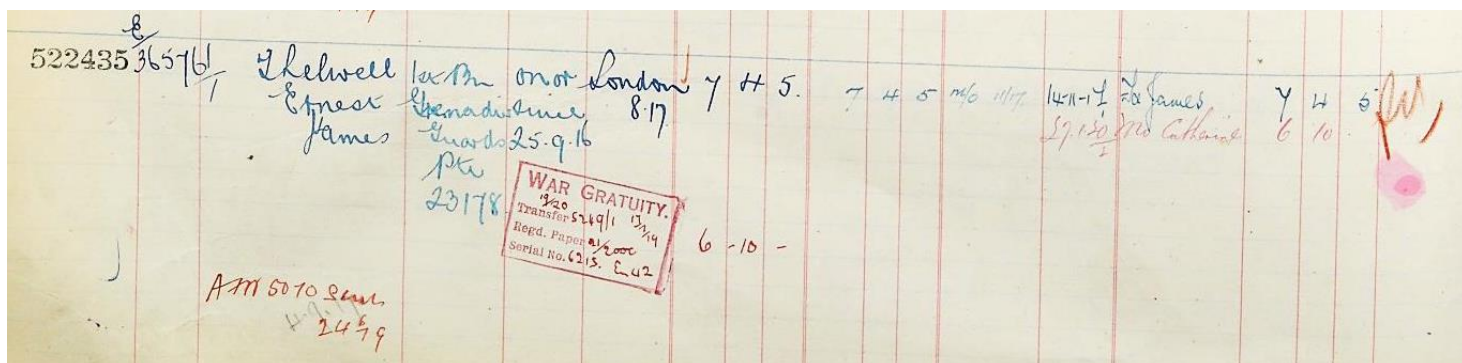
<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/12571508/ernest-james-thelwell#view-photo=67415288>



Ernest James Thelwell's body was never recovered and he is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial.

Although recorded by the CWGC as being aged 25 when he died, Ernest would have been exactly 24½.

Ernest's rank in the Guards was recorded as Private. The rank of Guardsman replaced that of Private in all Guards Regiments in 1919, an honour awarded by the King in recognition of their great effort during the War.



#### Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In mid-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. Ernest's parents received a payment of £13 14s 5d which included a war Gratuity of £6 10s. The £13 14s 5d is equivalent to a *labour value* (wages) of around £2184 in 2017.

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.

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
THELWELL Ernest J	G Gds	Ydsn	23178
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	G G/103B/4	1277	
BRITISH	do	do	
STAR			
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

Ernest James Thelwell, possibly in 1913, in his police uniform

The CWGC recorded that Ernest's parents were living at 38, Overleigh Road in Handbridge, Chester, following the war.

James Thelwell, Ernest's father, died, aged 55, in mid-1919. Catherine died mid-1960, aged 97, in the Chester area.

At the time of the 1939 Register (29 September) Catherine was still living at 38 Overleigh Road with three of her unmarried children:

- Catherine Thelwell    born 14 February 1863  
widow
- Ruth                    born 22 April 1895  
single    unemployed
- Gwenyth                born 29 June 1896  
single    mental nurse
- Henry                    born 19 February 1901  
single    heavy motor driver

One line of the record has been redacted



38 Overleigh Road, Handbridge [Google StreetView]

Ruth died, unmarried, in the Chester district in early 1981.

It is not known when Gwenyth died; it is believed that she remained unmarried.

Henry died in the Chester district in late 1967 aged 66. It is not known whether he married.

Nothing is known of Dora, Ernest's sister although it is possible that she died before the 1911 census (no record of her death has been identified).

Little is known of William, Ernest's younger brother although it is probable that he died in the Nantwich area, aged 27, in early 1919.

Charles Colin Thelwall, a younger brother of Ernest, also served in WW1; he enlisted on 16 November 1914 in Chester when he was aged 17 years 1 month and he served with a Territorial force, the 5<sup>th</sup> (Earl of Chester's) Battalion Cheshire Regiment for 1 year 203 days until his discharge on 5 June 1916. Although described, on enrolment, as being 5ft 9¼ins tall and with good vision and physical development, Charles was found to be a carrier of Cerebrospinal Meningitis, a very serious inflammation of the membranes covering the brain and the spinal cord that was often fatal. Consequently, Charles never left Britain with the army and he spent 101 days of his service, from 11 February until 22 May 1916, in the Norwich Military Isolation Hospital.

Charles married Dorothy Bradbury at St Michael's Church, Claughton, Birkenhead, in late 1934 and they were living at 42 Hillview Avenue, Runcorn, in 1939:

Charles C Thelwell	born 18 October 1897	police constable
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Dorothy	born 20 May 1891	
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One line of the record has been redacted

Dorothy died, aged 58, on Wirral in early 1950 and Charles died in late 1978.