

31: Norman Roe Foster

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Norman Roe Foster

Rank: Lieutenant

Battalion / Regiment: 1st/7th Bn. Cheshire Regiment

Service Number: ? Date of Death: 26 March 1917 Age at Death: 26

Buried / Commemorated at: Gaza War Cemetery, Gaza, Gaza Strip

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of Harry and Mary Jane Foster, of Glenton House, Bull Hill, Little Neston. Born at Burnley, Lancashire

Although no additional details are given there, Norman Roe Foster is commemorated also on the Burnley Roll of Honour [<http://burnleyinthegreatwar.info/>]

Norman Roe Foster was the son of Harry Foster who lived at Glenton House, Bull Hill, Little Neston and he was educated at Manchester Grammar School, the King's School, Chester and the Cheshire County (University of Manchester) Agricultural College ¹.

Norman's father, Harry Foster married Mary Jane Roe in Chorlton, Lancashire, in late 1877. At the time of the 1901 census Harry Foster (45, born Halifax, 'terra cotta & brick works manager and accountant') was living with his wife (Mary Jane Foster, 44, born Manchester) and son Norman Roe Foster (11, born Burnley), together with a servant, at St Anne's Road East, St Annes-on-Sea. Norman's birth was recorded in Burnley in the 3rd quarter of 1890.

By the time of the 1911 census Norman, 20, was shown as boarding in Hastings where he was an articled clerk to a surveyor. In the same census his parents are shown as being at 6, Beach Road, St Annes-on-the-Sea [a house with 10 rooms] where, despite the census return being addressed to him, both Harry Foster and Mary Jane, are recorded as 'visitor' although no other family is recorded. Harry Foster, 53, is recorded as a 'representative, brick & terra cotta works'; Harry & Mary had been married for 23 years and, of their 4 children, 3 had survived. With them in the house was 'Basil Boddington', 2, recorded as a son, together with a domestic nurse and a domestic servant. Harry Foster is recorded in Kelly's Directory (1923) as living at Glenton House, Little Neston but it is unclear as to when the family moved to the town.



Glenton House on Bull Hill, Little Neston
[August 2014]

¹ This was probably the Holmes Chapel College of Agriculture, founded in 1895, which was established in association with the University of Manchester and funded by Cheshire County Council. In 1919 its operations moved to Reaseheath, near Nantwich

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.	11.	12.	13.	14.	15.
Arthur George Norris Head	34	Married	10	3	1	2	Boarding House Keeper	Employer	London					
Elizabeth Jane Norris Wife	35			3	1	2	Managing business	Worker	London					
Ronald Norris Son	6								London					
Margaret Cades Boarder	32	Single					Private means		London, Blackheath					
Norman Roe Foster Boarder	20	Single					Surveyor's Articled Clerk		London, Burnley					
Eric Scott Russell Boarder	19	Single					Bank Clerk		London, Hastings					
Percy Burnidge Boarder	24	Single					Antique dealer's Clerk		London, Hastings					
Marguerite Morris Hayward Servant	25	Single					Housemaid		London, Hastings					
Anne Wood Boarder	54	Single					Private means		London, Hastings					

(To be filled up by the Enumerator)				(To be filled up by, or on behalf of, the Head of Family or other person in occupation, or in charge, of this dwelling.)							
<p>I certify that—</p> <p>(1) All the persons on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex columns.</p> <p>(2) I have entered the maiden and married names in Columns 2 and 3 separately, and have compared their ages with the total number of persons.</p> <p>(3) After making the necessary inquiries I have ascertained all persons on the Schedule who appeared to be defective, and have reported such as appeared to be insane.</p> <p>Initials of Enumerator: <i>C.M.F.</i></p>				<p>Write below the Number of Rooms in this Dwelling (House, Tenement, or Apartment). Count the kitchen as a room but do not count outhouses, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom, nor warehouse, office, shop.</p> <p>15.</p>							
<p>Total.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Males</th> <th>Females</th> <th>Total</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>4</td> <td>9</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Males	Females	Total	5	4	9	<p>I declare that this Schedule is correctly filled up to the best of my knowledge and belief.</p> <p>Signature: <i>A.G. Norris</i></p> <p>Postal Address: <i>22 Holmesdale Gardens, Hastings.</i></p>	
Males	Females	Total									
5	4	9									

1911 census (condensed) – 22 Holmesdale Gardens, Hastings

Norman Roe Foster, 20, single, was one of four boarders at a house run by Arthur George Norris in Hastings. Norman, born in Burnley, was an articled clerk to a surveyor, presumably with 'Messrs. Woodham, Son & Parks, Estate Agents of Hastings' as mentioned in the newspaper report following his death.

The newspaper reports of Norman's death record that he '*...was articled to Messrs. Woodham, Son & Parks, estate agents of Hastings, and afterwards took a post under the Government Land Valuation Department, being stationed in Liverpool*'. It is noted also that he joined the Cheshires on the first day of the war and fought at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli, where he was twice injured and hospitalised.

Both the 1/6th & 1/7th Battalions Cheshire Regiment were Territorial Forces which were formed on 4 August 1914 with the 1/7th Battalion being stationed at Macclesfield as part of the Cheshire Brigade of the Welsh Division. The troops then moved to Shrewsbury and on to Northampton before, in November 1914, being mobilised for war leaving the Welsh Division and landing in France where they joined the G.H.Q. Troops. [A General Headquarters, known as a G.H.Q., was formed for each theatre of war, often when the build-up of British forces became too large or complex for the local forces there to retain adequate command. If, however, the General Officer Commanding reported to another British General, then the headquarters was known as an HQ. A GHQ/HQ would carry a complement of guard, transport and signals troops.

[Source: The Long, Long Trail <http://www.1914-1918.net/ghq.htm>]

Wikipedia records that:- *The landing at Suvla Bay was an amphibious landing made at Suvla on the Aegean coast of Gallipoli peninsula in the Ottoman Empire as part of the August Offensive, the final British attempt to break the deadlock of the Battle of Gallipoli. The landing, which commenced on the night of 6 August 1915, was intended to support a breakout from the Anzac sector, five miles (8 km) to the south.*

Despite facing light opposition, the landing at Suvla was mismanaged from the outset and quickly reached the same stalemate conditions that prevailed on the Anzac and Helles fronts. On 15 August, after a week of indecision and inactivity, the British commander at Suvla, Lieutenant-General Sir Frederick Stopford was dismissed. His performance in command was one of the most incompetent feats of generalship of the First World War.

7th Battalion, The Cheshire Regiment; the undermentioned to be Second Lieutenants —

Robert Leslie Owen. Dated 2nd November, 1914.

Corporal Norman Roe Foster. Dated 14th November, 1914.

Cadet Robert Alexander Burton, from the Manchester University Contingent, Senior Division, Officers Training Corps. Dated 14th November, 1914.

Extract from *The London Gazette*, 13 November 1914, recording Norman Roe's promotion to Second Lieutenant.

On 17 December 1914 the troops transferred to the 15th Brigade of the 5th Division and on 1 March 1915 they transferred to G.H.Q. troops.

Between August and December 1915 the 1/7th Battalion was in the 159th Infantry Brigade of the 53rd Division and the troops landed on 'C' Beach at Suvla Bay in Gallipoli at 6.30am on 9

August. The final weeks of the Battalion's contribution in the disastrous campaign in Gallipoli are detailed briefly in the War Diary and, as Norman Roe is mentioned three times (with reference to his hospitalisation, although the reasons for this are unknown) this episode is worth recording:

ANAFARA SAGHIR

18/9/15 Trench mortar blew up while being fired from saphead, killed 2 men wounded one. At approx. 17.00 the line from CHOCOLATE HILL to extreme left was bombarded for some minutes by Turks with HE shells, but no attack followed.

20/9/15 Relieved by 40th BDE and proceeded to Divisional reserve on No. 1 Beach LALA BABA. Lieut. H.C. RIPPON to Hospital.

20/9/15 to 30/9/15 Divisional reserve LALA BABA. 2nd Lieut. N.R. FOSTER to Hospital 22.9.15.

1/10/15 to 31/10/15 Corps Reserve LALA BABA.

19/10/15 Battalion rearmed with short rifles and long bayonets.

1/11/15 Corps Reserve LALA BABA employed constructing defences LALA BABA.

9/11/15 to 18/11/15 From 19.30 the 1/7 Cheshire Reg^t was in a constant state of readiness to move till 48.30 18/11/15. 6/11/15 Capt. G.E. NELSON rejoined from ENGLAND and took over Adjutant.

17/11/15 2 Lⁿ. N.R. FOSTER rejoined from ALEXANDRA.

20/11/15 to 22/11/15 3 officers & 100 men garrisoned LALA BABA defences trenches A3 and A6 nightly from 16.30 to 05.00.

25/11/15 ----- do.-----

27/11/15 The Battn. less 2 Coys was attached to Highland Mounted Brigade & proceed[ed] to SOUTH AREA and occupied trenches in Brigade Reserve. The weather was very cold & a lot of casualties were caused by chill and frost bite. Remaining 2 Coys remained with 159 Inf. Bde. and were attached to 1/4 Cheshire Regt.

1/12/15 to 9/12/15 Battn. less two Coys attached Highland Mounted Brigade.

9/12/15 to 12/12/15 Battn. moved to LALA BABA. Employed on defences LALA BABA. 2nd. Lt. N.R. FOSTER Hospt. 11/12/15.

12/12/15 Evacuated SUVLA embarked on SS ERMINE.

13/12/15 Transhipped to HMT ASCANIA.

WARDAN, EGYPT 18/12/15 to 30/12/15 Arrived & disembarked ALEXANDRI and embarked for WARDAN. Arrived WARDAN.

30/12/15 to 31/12/15 WARDAN name changed to BENI SALAM Camp.

It is unknown why Alexandria is referred to as both *Alexandra* and *Alexandri*.

Following the unsuccessful Gallipoli campaign the evacuation of 80,000 troops from Suvla and Anzac, with much of their equipment, was completed by 20 December, and without significant loss as the Turks did not realise that the troops were being withdrawn.

Having arrived in Egypt the men of the 1/7th Battalion Cheshire Regiment remained in camp (nothing is known of the Beni Salam camp) although the movements and whereabouts of Norman Foster (who was last recorded as being in hospital on 11 December) are unknown. The 1/7th Battalion was in the 159th (Cheshire) Brigade and part of the 53rd (Welsh) Division. The brigade, under Brigadier-General Noel Ernest Money, served in the Middle East throughout WW1.

Norman Foster's death on 26 March 1917 took place in Gaza and coincides with The First Battle of Gaza, a one-day conflict:

The First Battle of Gaza was fought on 26 March 1917 during the first attempt by the Egyptian Expeditionary Force (EEF) to invade the south of Palestine in the Ottoman Empire during the Sinai and Palestine Campaign of the First World War. Fighting took place in and around the town of Gaza on the Mediterranean coast when infantry and mounted infantry from the Desert Column, a component of the Eastern Force, attacked the town. Late in the afternoon, on the verge of capturing Gaza, the Desert Column was withdrawn due to concerns about the approaching darkness and large Ottoman reinforcements. This British defeat was followed a few weeks later by the even more emphatic defeat of the Eastern Force at the Second Battle of Gaza in April 1917.

In August 1916 the EEF victory at Romani ended the possibility of land-based attacks on the Suez Canal, first threatened in February 1915 by the Ottoman Raid on the Suez Canal. In December 1916, the newly created Desert Column's victory at the Battle of Magdhaba secured the Mediterranean port of El Arish and the supply route, water pipeline, and railway stretching eastwards across the Sinai Peninsula. In January 1917 the victory of the Desert Column at the Battle of Rafa completed the capture of the Sinai Peninsula and brought the EEF within striking distance of Gaza.

In March, two months later, Gaza was attacked by Eastern Force infantry from the 52nd (Lowland) Division reinforced by an infantry brigade. This attack was protected from the threat of Ottoman reinforcements by the Anzac Mounted Division and a screen from the Imperial Mounted Division. The infantry attack from the south and southeast on the Ottoman garrison in and around Gaza was strongly resisted. While the Imperial Mounted Division continued to hold off threatening Ottoman reinforcements, the Anzac Mounted Division attacked Gaza from the north. They succeeded in entering the town from the north, while a joint infantry and mounted infantry attack on Ali Muntar captured the position. However, the lateness of the hour, the determination of the Ottoman defenders, and the threat from the large Ottoman reinforcements approaching from the north and north east, resulted in the decision by the Eastern Force to retreat. It has been suggested this move snatched defeat from the jaws of victory. [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/First_Battle_of_Gaza]

The War Diary of the 1/7th Battalion Cheshire Regiment for the period of this conflict, if it still exists, is currently unavailable (October 2018) and no details of Norman Foster's involvement or death are known. However, Arthur Crookenden recorded the events:

GAZA. 26th and 27th March, 1917.

Map p. 194

Towards the end of January, 1917, the 53rd Division, which had marched across the desert from the Suez Canal during the previous few months, found themselves at railhead, at that time El-Arish. A few days later they advanced some 10 miles northwards to cover the further construction of the railway towards Palestine.

For the next six weeks the railway advanced at a rate of about one mile a day, and the covering troops advanced by bounds to new positions as necessary.

About the middle of March, the 159th Infantry Brigade, which consisted of our Fourth and Seventh Battalions, and the 4th and 5th Welch Regiment, were out of the line "resting" near Rafah. Actually, they were engaged in the uncongenial task of sinking wells among the sand hills near the coast.

Rafah itself is a small village of little importance except for the fact that it stands upon the boundary between Egypt and Palestine, and also upon the only practicable road between these two countries. It is also on the edge of the desert, which stretches from this point to the Suez Canal.

During this period, the Commanding Officers (Colonel G. H. Swindells, 4th Battalion, and Colonel H. M. Lawrence, 7th Battalion) and Company Commanders made frequent reconnaissances towards Gaza with the Australian mounted troops and it therefore came as no great surprise when the Division was ordered to move forward to Khan Yunis on the 24th March. Gaza at this time was little more than an outpost held by a detachment on the flank of the Turkish line of communication. It had been decided to capture Gaza by a "coup de main."

Khan Yunis lies some six miles north of Rafah and is a considerable native village surrounded by orchards, the hedges of which consist of prickly pear cactus, which is almost impenetrable. In the village, there is a very deep well of good water and also the ruins of a rather fine Crusader's church.

The night of the 24/25th was spent in an almond orchard, the trees of which were in full bloom. No movement was permitted except after dark, as there were rumours that enemy aircraft were about.

On the 25th, the Brigade moved on to a position near Deir El Belah, starting in the late afternoon, and arriving after dark after a short march of five miles.

Their Drums and Fifes were with the 4th Battalion and, on moving from Khan Yunis in column of route, the possible presence of enemy aircraft having apparently been overlooked, were playing as usual. About a mile outside the village they had to pass the Divisional Commander, and the Staff appeared to be quite annoyed that the "Drums" should be playing when there was, as they described it, a "war on."

During the evening the men lay in a hollow getting colder and colder, as no lights or fires were allowed. Eventually orders were received to be ready to move off at midnight.

It is of interest to recall how the troops were clothed and equipped at this time, as this has some bearing on the subsequent operations.

First, it must be remembered that most of them had been out in a fairly hot climate for some 18 months or more, and so were not likely to be affected much by the heat in March. Moreover, they had recently marched across 150 miles of soft desert, and had never had more than one gallon of water a man a day for all purposes. So any lack of water was more easy to bear than had been the case at Suvla Bay. The clothing consisted of ordinary tropical kit, helmet and khaki drill shorts, but as the nights were very cold, serge jackets were retained. Full equipment was carried, but no greatcoats, and each man carried 200 rounds of S.A.A. and one additional day's rations for the battle.

There was no regimental wheeled transport, all water and cooking utensils were carried on camels, and each company had seven mules for the four company Lewis guns.

These transport arrangements were in some ways a nuisance. Camels are slow movers. On the other hand, they do not mind being shelled, and, while it was often difficult to get rations, water and reserve S.A.A. up when they were wanted, in no case was a convoy stampeded by enemy shell fire or bombing.

As to the mules, they were a definite advantage over wheeled transport, as the guns could be brought much further forward on mules than would have been the case if they had been carried on limbers.

The town of Gaza lies some two miles from the Mediterranean sea, and about 4½ miles north of the Wadi Ghuzze. (A wadi is the bed of a stream). This latter, in March, is a wide dry water course with a sandy bed and steep mud cliff banks. Into it run a large number of smaller wadis, all with steep sides. There are pools of water in various places in the bed of the main wadi, and fresh water can be obtained almost anywhere by digging down a few feet.

The Wadi, near its mouth, runs almost due east and west and along

its south bank there is a low range of hills which become sandy on the sea coast.

Immediately north of the Wadi, and about one mile from its mouth, is a low hill Tel-el-Ajul, the site of ancient Gaza, and between it and the sea is a stretch of very soft sand hills. To the eastward of Tel-el-Ajul runs the main road from Egypt to Gaza. This road runs up a shallow valley on the edge of the sand hills. Immediately to the east of the road is a low ridge running N.E. toward Gaza, then a valley, then another higher ridge, the Es Sire Ridge, and a further valley, beyond which lies the Burjahye Ridge. The valley between these last two ridges, which was subsequently known as Happy Valley, ends at some mud cliffs at Mansura Ridge, about 2½ miles S.E. of Gaza.

North-west of Mansura the ground is very open, falling away to a slight valley, the Wadi Mukademe, before rising gently to a ridge crowned with cactus hedges immediately east of Gaza. At the south end of this ridge is a detached and very conspicuous hill called Ali el Muntar, from the top of which a magnificent view of the surrounding country, including Gaza, can be obtained. This is the hill up which Samson is stated to have carried the gates of Gaza.

On the south, west and north-west of Ali el Muntar, are a large number of gardens, surrounded by cactus hedges, and which, at this time, were intersected by Turkish trenches. This difficult position was well named the Labyrinth.

The troops taking part in the battle consisted of the Australian and New Zealand Mounted Division (less one Brigade), the Imperial Mounted Division (less one Brigade) and the 53rd Division, all the above being under the command of General Chetwode.

The total artillery used at the first battle consisted of six 60 pounders, sixteen 4.5in. Howitzers, and sixty-four 18 pounders, but the 53rd Division's attack was supported by the fire of six 60 pounders, twelve 4.5in. Howitzers, and twenty-four 18 pounders only.

The rôle of the cavalry was to cut off Gaza from the north, and also to prevent the arrival of enemy reinforcements from the north, north-east and east, while that of the infantry was to capture the town.

The preliminary instructions for the infantry were that the 160th and 158th Brigades should cross the Wadi Ghuzze and proceed towards Ali el Muntar, and Mansura Ridge respectively, while the 159th Brigade with our 4th and 7th Battalions should cross the Wadi immediately behind the 158th Brigade, form up on the north side and await further orders.

The Battalions paraded shortly after midnight, but as Divisional orders had only been issued at 9.15 p.m., they had very little idea of what was taking place.

No maps were available, except such sketches as could be hastily drawn in Army Book 153.

The night was dark and cold, and although there was only about 3 miles to cover to arrive at the Wadi, there were very frequent delays, largely caused by the 158th Brigade losing their way and being about an hour late at the Wadi. Eventually, however, we got across and, as ordered, halted on the high ground immediately north of the Wadi.

Shortly afterwards a thick fog rolled up from the sea and, as it became light, it was impossible to see more than a few yards. At about 7.30 on the 26th the fog began to clear, but still no orders to move came, and it was not until 9.30 a.m. that orders were received for the Brigade to proceed forthwith to Mansura Ridge.

During this period all was quiet and apart from an occasional rifle shot from the direction of Gaza, there were no signs of any enemy activity.

About 10 a.m. the 159th Brigade was actually on the move towards Mansura Ridge and while the distance was only some 3 miles, it did not arrive at the destination until about noon, as the Brigade had to advance up Happy Valley in artillery formation owing to a certain amount of hostile shelling.

Meanwhile the infantry attack had been ordered to begin at 11.50 a.m., the 160th Brigade's objective being the Labyrinth and south slopes of Ali el Muntar and that of the 158th Brigade the east slopes of Ali el Muntar. There was accordingly a large gap between the Brigades when the attack started, but they joined up later.

On arrival at Mansura, the 159th Brigade received orders to join in the attack, the tasks being to seize the high ridge running north from Ali el Muntar, and to guard the right flank of the 158th Brigade.

The Brigade attacked on a two-battalion front. The 1/5th Welch on the left and our 4th Battalion on the right.

As the attack had already started and had got 1,000 yards ahead, there was no time for reconnaissance, and the Brigade was pushed out at once. In fact, in order to catch up, a large amount of doubling was necessary.

The 1/4th Welch were in support and our 7th Battalion were in Divisional reserve, still behind Mansura Ridge.

The 4th Battalion attacked on a two-company front, with "A" on the right and "B" on the left, with "C" behind "A" and "D" behind "B."

As soon as they left the shelter of Mansura Ridge, they came under fairly heavy shrapnel fire which made it necessary to advance in artillery formation. Shortly after, as the enemy machine guns were becoming active, they had to extend.

A very great initial difficulty was that the attack was at right angles to the line of march and so the Battalions had to change direction from north-east to north-west. As the 4th Battalion were on the outer flank

of the Brigade, they had further to go than the others, and had difficulty in keeping up. In addition, as will be described later, a gap appeared between the left of "B" Company and the right of the 5th Welch.

There was no artillery forward observation officer at the assembly position, partly because the Brigade had moved so far and so fast that no wire could be laid. Consequently all communication with the guns had to be by runner or galloper, and the result was that the objective, a cactus hedge, crossing the Beersheba road, was not shelled, and the advance was more costly than it need have been. Throughout the battle, artillery fire was inadequate because the field guns remained at Mansura, and were out of range. "Co-operation" was not.

The 4th Battalion, after deployment, found itself on a gentle, grassy slope running down for about a mile to a small wadi, the Wadi Mukademe, from which point the ground rose gradually to the top of the ridge east of Gaza. This ridge was crowned by cactus hedges which were Turkish position. On the left of the ridge was the clearly defined hill of Ali el Muntar, upon which our shells were bursting. To the right front, a line of telegraph posts showed the line of the Gaza-Beersheba road, and further to the right again was a slight rise called Clay Hill.

There was no cover except in the bottom of the Wadi Mukademe and the troops were in full view of the enemy's position. As the advance continued, the enemy machine gun fire became more and more effective from the enemy left, and casualties occurred.

As the 4th Battalion advanced, it was clear that they were losing touch with the 5th Welch on their left, either because the latter were edging in towards Ali el Muntar, from which point the greater part of the enemy fire was coming, or because the 4th Battalion had not wheeled round enough when the change of direction took place. The left of "B" Company was aiming for the point where the Gaza-Beersheba road crossed the ridge near Clay Hill, whereas the right of the 5th Welch were apparently making for a gap in the ridge just north of Ali el Muntar. This gap was subsequently known by the delightful name of Delilah's Neck. Noticing that there would be a space of about 400 to 500 yards between the Battalions, Lieut. Danson edged out with the leading platoon of "D" Company to fill it up. Eventually the whole of "D" Company followed.

By this time, the enemy fire was becoming heavy and effective, the advance had to be continued by short rushes.

Movement forward became painfully slow and a great deal of ammunition was fired against the cactus hedge, from which the enemy's fire was very heavy, although there were actually no Turks to be seen. Gradually the firing line, composed of all units of the Brigade, got to within about 200 yards of the enemy.

At 3.30 p.m., the 7th Battalion was thrown into the fight on the left, to support the 5th Welch, and at long last some field guns, the 21st Field Brigade, moved forward. This support had immediate effect, but it was not till the guns began to shell the cactus hedge, which marked the enemy front line, effectively that the position could be assaulted. Then the Welch and 7th Battalion stormed the outlying portions of the citadel, and the 4th Battalion captured Clay Hill.

Although, according to the official History of the Palestine Campaign, Ali El Muntar was captured by the 5th R.W.F. and 5th Welch Regt., at 3.50 p.m., actually it was captured by a very mixed bag of about 70 individuals, and including officers and men of the 4th Battalion.

Quite a number of prisoners were taken at Ali el Muntar, among them several Austrian gunner officers. They had probably been observing from the hill, and evidently did not expect to be captured as they had on their best uniforms, complete with medals.

Ali el Muntar itself was very strongly fortified, with a row of trenches round the bottom, a second row about half way up and a final row on the top. The hill itself is very steep, and at that time was crowned with a sheik's tomb and a few trees. During the subsequent few months these disappeared. The hill had been used as an O.P. and the view from it was most extensive.

On the north side of the hill, about half way up, was a trench dug back into the hill, with a dug-out behind it. This trench could not be seen from the front, as it faced the flank, and owing to the steepness of the hill it was about 10 feet deep, a few feet from the entrance. Across this trench, and about four feet from the entrance, was a steel plate with a hole in it for the muzzle of a machine gun. This gun had evidently been trained on the front of the first cactus hedge, along which it could fire for about 400 yards.

Very fortunately for the attackers, one of our 4.5 howitzer shells had dropped right over the hill and had got a direct hit on this trench, thus putting the gun out of action. Though the troops did not get very much support from the artillery during the battle, they certainly blessed them for that lucky shot which probably saved a great number of lives.

Ali el Muntar was the key to the Turkish position and while there was a good deal of promiscuous firing from all sides for some little time after its capture, and although our 60 pounders did their best to blow our men off the hill for a short period, things gradually became quiet and the hill was put into a state of defence.

By now the 7th Battalion were coming up, their place as Divisional reserve having been taken by the 161st Brigade. They eventually took over Ali el Muntar and consolidated the position.

The men were immensely pleased with their success. They felt that the failure of Gallipoli had been avenged.

Efforts were now made to re-organize the troops, but everyone was very tired and very thirsty. A pool of water, full of tadpoles, provided

a welcome drink for some of the 4th Battalion. No orders came for a move. Dusk came on. Outposts were put out towards Gaza by individual Company Commanders.

There was complete silence from Gaza, and hardly a shot was fired. The cries of the wounded lying out in the open could be heard but it was almost impossible to do anything for them as it was most difficult to find them in the darkness, and they were scattered over a wide area. In spite of the almost superhuman efforts of the stretcher bearers and others, it proved to be impossible to collect them all and unfortunately a number were subsequently taken prisoners by the Turks.

During the early part of the night a certain amount of S.A.A. came up, and Lewis gun magazines were refilled. In the withdrawal later, their added weight was a great disadvantage, although all took a turn with them.

The only other matter which gave a certain amount of interest at the time was the appearance of some Australians from Gaza. All troops had had strict injunctions not to enter the town, but these Australians had apparently got detached from their unit north of the town and had come straight through. As friendly troops from the direction of Gaza were not expected, they were very lucky to have got through our line without being shot, though from their language when challenged, it was clear that they were not Turks.

At about 8 p.m. on the 26th, or soon afterwards, to the amazement, indignation and wrath of all ranks, a withdrawal of the infantry began, starting on the right.

The Brigade bivouaced on the Mansura ridge, and remained there till the afternoon of the 27th. With chagrin, the troops watched the Turks re-occupy the ridge which had been so gallantly won the day before.

Towards dusk, the march back to the Wadi Ghuzze was resumed.

That march was a nightmare. Our Battalions were the last to move and marched down the sandy bed of the Wadi, running down Happy Valley until it joined the Wadi Ghuzze until finally they emerged near the Cairo road. The troops were terribly depressed by this incomprehensible retreat. The night was very dark and it was impossible to see. The bed of the Wadi was soft and its course very winding. There were constant checks. Everyone was very tired and most of the men were asleep as they marched, and at every check, bumped into the man ahead. At one point a company commander fell asleep on his horse and promptly fell off, causing a mild diversion.

On one occasion they lost their way and proceeded for some hundreds of yards in the wrong direction towards the Turkish position, before the guide found out his mistake. While he was trying to find the right track, the whole 4th Battalion went to sleep.

Eventually, however, at about 2 a.m. on the 28th, they reached the high ground south of the Wadi Ghuzze, overlooking Red House. They had only covered about 7 miles, but the conditions were so bad that it seemed much further.

So ended the first Battle of Gaza. Between 5 p.m. on the 25th, when they left Khan Yunis, until 2 a.m. on the 28th, when they arrived back over the Wadi, the Brigade had marched between 25 and 30 miles, pushed the Turk out of his position captured, Gaza, and also dug two lots of trenches. All felt that though the battle was for some reason a failure, the responsibility did not rest with the troops engaged, and they were, in fact, very proud of themselves.

In considering the reasons for the failure of the Desert Column to capture Gaza on the 27th March, we may begin by dismissing the official explanation—the fog. It was held that owing to the delay of several hours which resulted therefrom, the time available for attaining the objective was so curtailed that night fell before the task was accomplished, and a withdrawal to the Wadi Ghuzze was rendered necessary, partly because the Turkish relieving force was approaching from the east, and partly because the horses had to be watered. But, in fact, the fog, which lasted about four hours, entailed far less than four hours' delay as the infantry continued to advance throughout its duration, if at a slower pace; whilst for the mounted troops, whose advance under their own skilled guides across the open country lying to the east of Gaza, was screened from hostile observation, the fog was a positive advantage.

Likewise we may dismiss the minor causes adduced. It is true that General Dallas took several hours to reconnoitre the position, when in fact the order for the attack could quite well have been dictated from the map. It is true also that delay occurred in moving up the 159th Brigade. But incidents of this nature were only to be expected with troops taking part in their first battle since the fiasco of Suvla Bay, and do not suffice to account for Gaza remaining in Turkish hands, if not at nightfall, at any rate next day.

For the real causes of the failure we must go deeper and start further back. As few troops were employed as possible, owing to water and transport difficulties, so the 52nd Division was immobilized at Rafa, and was not available in the event of unforeseen emergencies. Gaza had to be taken by a "coup de main" or not at all.

It thus resulted that when the infantry advance proved slower than had been anticipated, there were no reserves available to impart fresh impulse.

Secondly, the operations were planned to repeat the successes of Magdhaba and Rafa, where detachments beyond reach of immediate support had been brilliantly "snapped" by the Anzac Mounted Division and Camel Brigade. But the parallel was far from exact. Gaza was a much harder nut to crack than either of the other two places, and the

Turkish General Reserve was known to be occupying an area which began again eight miles away at Huj. Actually there were no Turks on the march westwards of Huj until after 4 o'clock, an inexplicable delay in marching to the sound of the guns that far more than offset any delay which our operations suffered owing to the fog.

Thirdly, no steps were taken to prevent the arrival of the Turkish General Reserve, beyond throwing out a few squadrons which had little or no power of resistance. At least the whole of the Camel Brigade, which had about twice the rifle strength of a Mounted Brigade, should have been thrown across the Huj-Gaza road and ordered to dig in.

Finally, in spite of all the mistakes that were made, there was no need to withdraw the mounted troops at nightfall. The Turkish relieving force was still six miles away and could have been prevented without difficulty from advancing far in the night. The horses could have gone without water for a few hours more. But south of the Wadi Ghuzze, where both Eastern Force H.Q. and Desert Corps H.Q. remained throughout the fight, the Commanders took the cautious view, with the result that a battle, which the troops by their gallantry had already won, was converted into a defeat.

In these operations, the 7th Battalion lost four officers, J. A. Clayton, N. R. Foster, G. P. Gregg and J. O. Laybourne, 12 N.C.O.s and men killed, and 175 wounded. One officer was missing. The 4th Battalion had fewer losses, six men killed, nine officers and 96 men wounded and 10 missing.

Lieutenant Norman Roe Foster, Cheshire Regiment, is reported killed in action.

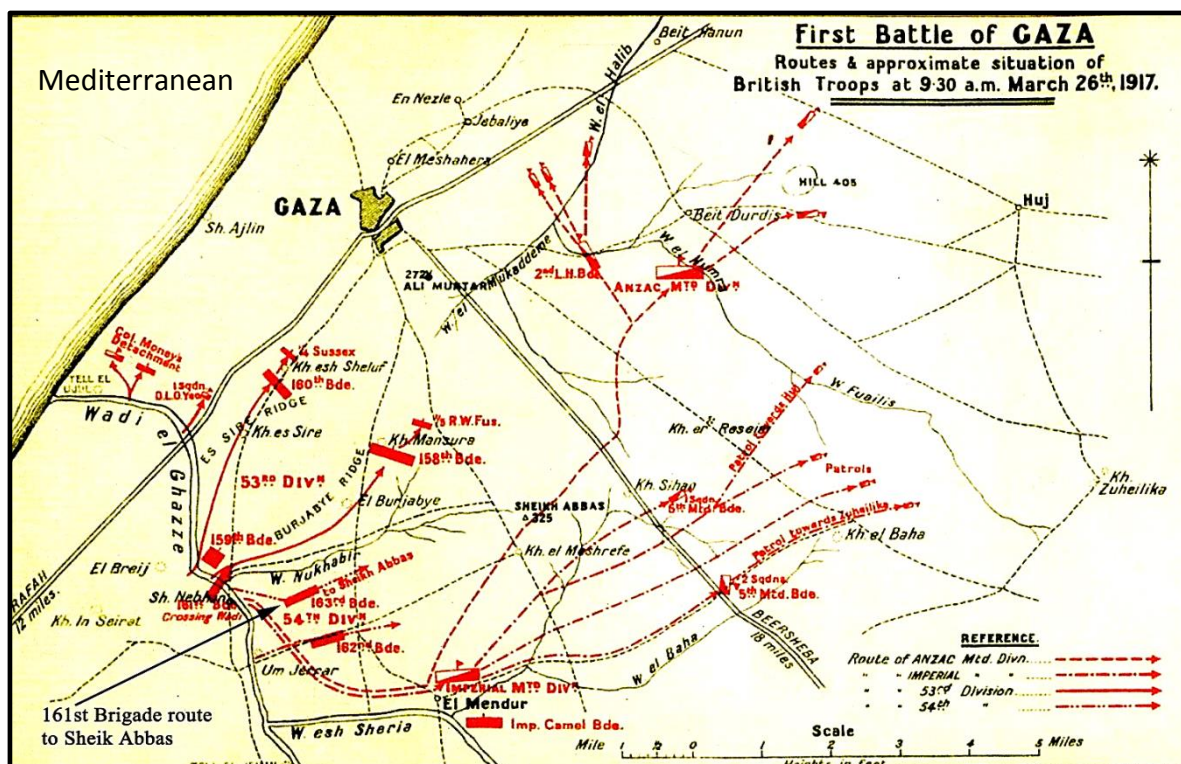
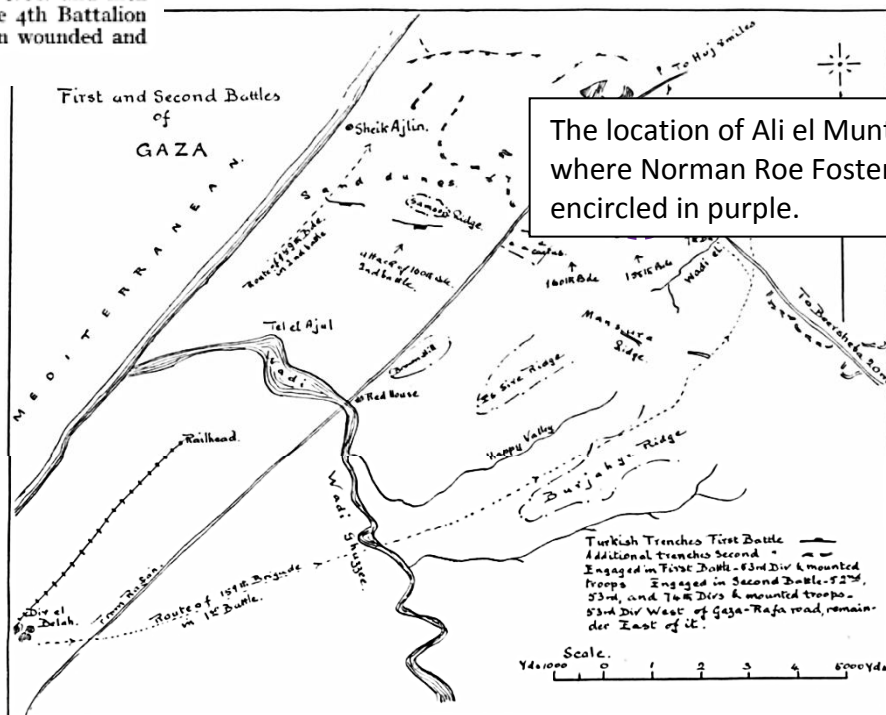
The brief record of Norman Foster's death in 'ULULA' The Manchester Grammar School Magazine, No. 333. MAY. 1917

[Source: <http://www.worldwar1schoolarchives.org/>]

The map shows the position of the 159th Brigade (53rd Division) in the western sector (lower left on map) of the conflict zone:

[Text and map from:

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



Source: http://alihollington.typepad.com/historic_battlefields/2014/03/first-battle-of-gaza.html

Name 23/10/21 FOSTER.		Corps. Chesh. Regt.	Rank * 2nd Lieut. * Lt.	Regtl. No. 7/2090
Norman Rd.				
Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.	
* VICTORY	04. 164	75	KmA 26. 3. 17 Registered. 14/14. 1. V. X/3235. 0/27.10.21. 8.7/6/148. 63/9/2150 83/6/1148 EF 9/3298 K 1380.	
* BRITISH	04. 164	22		
* 15 STAR				
Theatre of War first served in				
Date of entry therein				

Correspondence.
Surv. of claims sub: by O/c. No. 2 Res Shrewsbury 29/4/19.
application from H. Foster in respect of his late son Lt
N.R. Foster. Status discont. Aug. 1915.

Address. Glenton House
Neston
Cheshire.

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

Neston Officer Killed.

Lieutenant Norman Rae Foster (26), Cheshire Regiment, has been killed in action. He was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Harry Foster, Glenton House, Neston. Educated at the King's School, Chester, and Cheshire County University of Manchester Agricultural College, Cheshire, he was articled to Messrs. Woodham, Son, and Parks, estate agents, of Hastings, and afterwards, took a post under the Government Land Valuation Department, being stationed in Liverpool.

He joined the Cheshires on the first day of the war; fought at Suvla Bay, Gallipoli, being invalided twice to hospital. He, however, rejoined his unit on each occasion without coming to England. He was killed in action on March 26, after having done good work, for which he had been several times spoken of very highly.

Birkenhead News – Saturday 7 April 1917

Almost identical reports appeared in the *Chester Chronicle* of Saturday 14 April 1917 and the *Liverpool Echo* of Thursday 5 April 1917

27367	9/22 1139	Foster Lt.	N. R.	Cheshire Regt.	26-3-17 in action	Transfer 24/23 9/14 C.P. Davis 5/14	105 8 1 34 11 6
<p>WAR GRATUITY.</p> <p>Transfer Regd. Paper 4/19.20 Serial No. 3.3.20</p>							

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.

Norman Foster had accrued credits of £105 8s 1d and £37 11s - considerable amounts – and it is recorded that this was 'transferred' although the significance of this is unknown and no legatee/benefactor is named. A War Gratuity of £6 was also paid.

The total payment, £148 19s 1d, is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of about £22650 in 2018.

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.