

50: (John) Edward Johnson

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: E. Johnson Recorded by CWGC as J.E. Johnson
 Rank: Private
 Battalion / Regiment: 13th Bn. Cheshire Regiment
 Service Number: W/255 Date of Death: 18 April 1917 Age at Death: ?
 Buried / Commemorated at: Roisel Communal Cemetery Extension, Roisel, Departement de la Somme
 Picardie, France
 Additional information given by CWGC: None

Named in newspaper reports alternatively as J E Johnson and Edward Johnson, the War Office record lists him as John Edward Johnson and notes that he was born in Neston and enlisted in Neston. He would have been 20 when he died.

John Edward Johnson was the son of collier/labourer Thomas & Eliza Johnson and he was baptised at Neston 8 November 1896 when his father was a labourer. He was the first of two sons - the other being John's elder brother, William - to be killed in the war.

Thomas Johnson, a son of Thomas snr and Sarah Johnson (in the 1871 census Thomas was 11 months and his father was recorded as the publican of The Royal Oak in Little Neston) married Eliza Taylor Garnham at St Margaret's Church, Walton, Liverpool, in the third quarter of 1893. Thomas died in 1898 and was buried in Neston on 14 June aged 28. In the 1901 census the family was living on Chester Road, Neston:

Eliza T. Johnson	Widow	28	Dressmaker	Own acct	40	do	do
Hannah	Daughter	5	—	—	—	do	do
John E.	Son	4	—	—	—	do	do
Mary Mellor	Cousin	28	Dressmaker's asst	Worker	—	do	do

1901 – Chester Road, Neston

Eliza T. Johnson	28	widow, dressmaker, own account	born Neston
Hannah	5		born Neston
John E.	4		born Neston
Mary Mellor	28	cousin, dressmaker's assistant	born Neston

When Eliza and Thomas married in 1893, Eliza was already expecting their first child as William Taylor Johnson was baptised at Neston 11 March 1894. Thomas was then recorded as a collier as he had been, aged 20, in the 1891 census when still living with his parents Thomas [now a general labourer] and Sarah.

William Taylor Johnson was not recorded in the household at the time of the 1901 census but is recorded, aged 7, as living with his grandparents William (a grocer) and

Hannah Garnham on Bridge Street, Neston, where he was recorded also in the 1911 census.

William Taylor Johnson, like his brother John Edward Johnson, died during WW1 when he suffocated in March 1918 [see entry [52: William Taylor Johnson](#)].

Hannah, Eliza and Thomas' second child, was baptised at Neston on 11 August 1895 when Thomas was recorded as a collier.

Neston Parish Registers record that another child, Margaret Thomasine Johnson, was baptised 1 July 1898 when Thomas was recorded as a collier, although he had died around 3 weeks earlier. However, Margaret died, aged 1 year 10 months, and was buried at Neston on 17 April 1900.

By the time of the 1911 census Eliza had remarried and was living with her husband, Richard Naylor, and their children on Bridge Street, Neston:

No.	Name	Relationship	Age	Sex	Married	Single	Widow	Divorced	Occupation	Place of Birth	Language	Religion
1	Richard Naylor	Head	33	M	Married 7y				Platelayer, G.C. Railway	Burwardsley, Cheshire	English	—
2	Eliza Naylor	Wife	38	F	Married 7y					Neston, Cheshire	English	—
3	Hannah Johnson	Stepdaughter	15	F	Single					Neston, Cheshire	English	—
4	J. Edward Johnson	Stepson	14	M	Single				School 390	Neston, Cheshire	English	—
5	Sarah Doris Naylor	Daughter	5	F	—					Neston, Cheshire	English	—
6	Thomas Naylor	Son	4	M	—					Neston, Cheshire	English	—
7	Florence Naylor	Daughter	3	F	—					Neston, Cheshire	English	—
8	Richard Naylor	Son	1	M	—					Neston, Cheshire	English	—
9	Herbert Macardle	Boarder	38	M	—				Boat Maker 300	Neston, Cheshire	English	—
10										Neston, Cheshire	English	—

(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 names on this Schedule are entered in the proper sex column.</p> <p>(2) I have counted the names and females in Column 2 and 4 separately, and have compared their sum with the total number of persons.</p> <p>(3) After making the necessary inquiries I have completed all entries on the Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have corrected such as appeared to be erroneous.</p> <p>Signature of Enumerator <i>W. W. W.</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 scullery, landing, lobby, closet, bathroom, nor warehouse, office, shop.</p> <p>7</p>							
<p>Total</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Males</th> <th>Females</th> <th>Persons</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>5</td> <td>4</td> <td>9</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>				Males	Females	Persons	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>Richard Naylor</i></p> <p>Postal Address <i>Neston, Cheshire</i></p>	
Males	Females	Persons									
5	4	9									

1911 census (condensed) – Bridge Street, Neston

Richard Naylor	33	platelayer, G.C. Railway	born Burwardsley, Cheshire
Eliza Naylor	38	no occupation recorded	born Neston
Hannah Johnson	15	stepdaughter	born Neston
J. Edward Johnson	14	stepson	born Neston
Sarah Doris Naylor	5		born Neston
Thomas Naylor	4		born Neston
Florence Naylor	3		born Neston
Richard Naylor	1		born Neston
Herbert Macardle	38	boarder, boat builder	born Neston

Richard and Eliza had been married for 7 years and it is recorded that all four of their children were still living. No record of the marriage has been found.

As the Service Records of John Edward Johnson have not been found it is not possible to determine the detail of his army career or the circumstances of his death. However it is known that the 13th (Service) Battalion Cheshire Regiment (informally, the 'Wirral Battalion') was raised at Port Sunlight on 1 September 1914 by Gershom Stewart, MP.

They moved to Chester and joined 74th Brigade, 25th Division in Kitchener's Third New Army.

The Division assembled in the area around Salisbury for training and the 13th Cheshires spent the winter in billets in Bournemouth. The division moved to Aldershot in May 1915 for final training before proceeding to France on 25 September 1915 and concentrated in the area of Nieppe.

Their first action was in defence of the German attack on Vimy Ridge in May 1916. They then moved to The Somme and joined the action just after the main attack, with the 75th Brigade making a costly attack near Thiepval on 3 July.

LATE PRIVATE EDWARD JOHNSON.—Pte. Johnson, who gave his life for King and Country in France, particulars of which were given in the "Chronicle" a week or two ago, was a member of the "Shepherd's Club," and on Sunday a memorial service was held by the members of the society, including the deceased's parents and friends, at the Parish Church. The Shepherds attended in force with their draped crooks and marched to and from church in processional order. The Rev. C. Brooke Gwynne at the close of the sermon referred to the death of Private Johnson, and Mr. Howick played the "Dead March" in "Saul."

Chester Chronicle - Saturday 19 May 1917

The Division was in action at The Battle of Bazentin, The Battle of Pozieres and

The Battle of the Ancre Heights. In June 1917 they were in action at The Battle of Messines although John Edward Johnson had died the previous month.

It is not known how John died on 18 April 1917 as the 13th Battalion Cheshire Regiment does not appear to have been involved in any significant action around that date.

Amendments to the Service Medal and Award Rolls indicate that, at the time of his death, John Edward Johnson had been transferred from the 13th Battalion Cheshire Regiment to the 15th Battalion, a Bantam battalion.

However, as with the 13th Battalion the 15th Battalion does not appear to have been involved in any significant action around the date of John's death. Nevertheless, as John was buried at Roisel in mid-April 1917 it may be surmised that died immediately following the action - perhaps as a consequence of a localised action or German shelling - known as The Pursuit of the German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line (14 March - 5 April 1917) as Roisel was in the area of significant action at this time.

Operation Alberich (Unternehmen Alberich) was the code name of a German military operation in France during the First World War. It was a planned withdrawal to new positions on the shorter and more easily defended Hindenburg Line (Siegfriedstellung), which took place between 9 February and 20 March 1917. The retirement eliminated the two salients which had been formed during the Battle of the Somme in 1916, between Arras and Saint-Quentin and from Saint-Quentin to Noyon. After the war, the British named it the German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line but the operation was a calculated strategic withdrawal after months of preparation, rather than a retreat after defeat in battle. The retirement to the chord of the



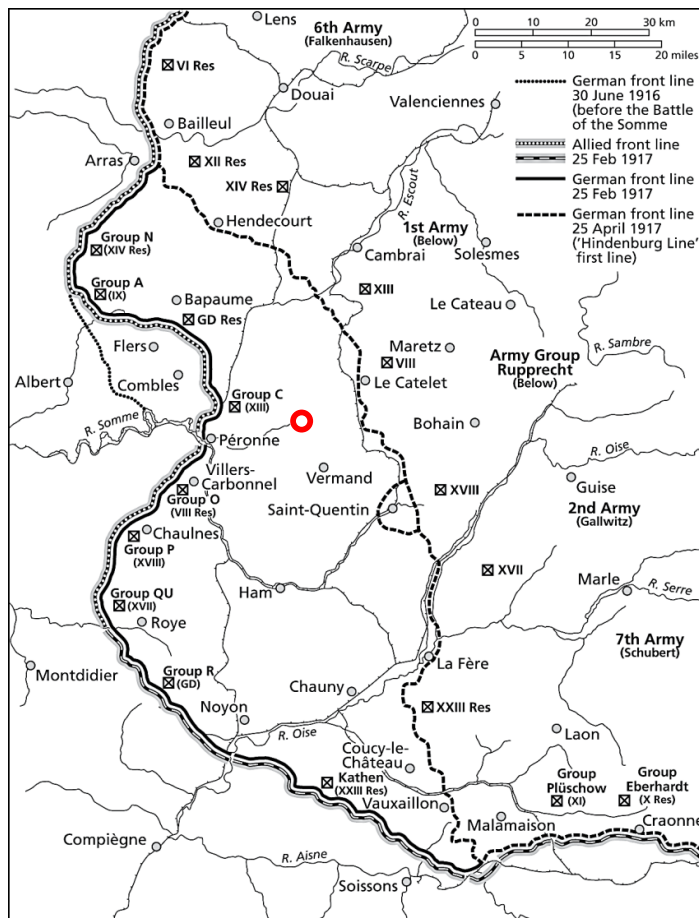
Cheshire Observer - Saturday 26 December 1914

Bapaume and Noyon salients shortened the Western Front, providing 13–14 extra divisions for the German reserve being assembled to defend the Aisne front against the Nivelle Offensive being prepared by the French.

Railways and roads were dug up, trees were felled, water wells were polluted, towns and villages were destroyed and a large number of land mines and other booby-traps were planted.

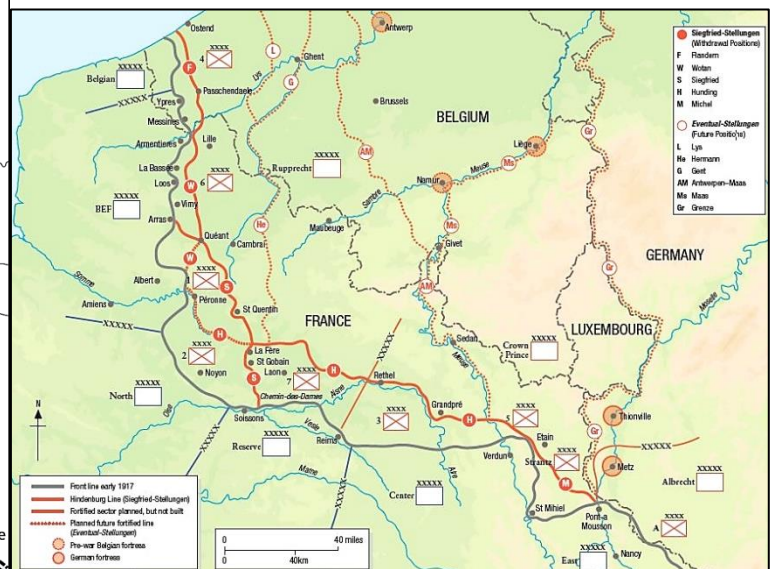
The first intimation of a German withdrawal occurred when British patrols probing German outposts towards Serre, found them unoccupied. The British began a slow follow-up but unreadiness, the decrepitude of the local roads and the German advantage of falling back on prepared lines behind rearguards of machine-gunners, meant that the Germans completed an orderly withdrawal. The new defences were built on a reverse slope (Hinterhangstellung) with positions behind the defences, from which artillery observers could see the front position, experience having showed that infantry equipped with machine-guns needed a field of fire only a few hundred yards/meters deep.

[Extract from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Alberich]



Change in the front line from 30 June 1916 to 25 April 1917. The location of the village of Roisel, near to which John Johnson is buried, is shown by the red circle.

https://static.cambridge.org/resource/id/urn:cambridge.org/id:binary:20160805133331866-0516:76385map8_3.png?pub-status=live

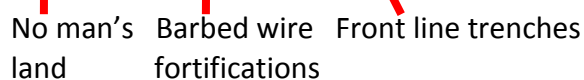
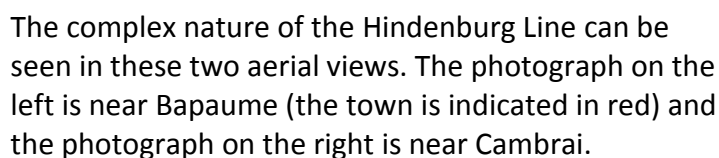


https://ospreypublishing.com/blog/hindenburg_line_100/

Within the European context the front line positions were:

The Hindenburg Line comprised five operational zones, or Stellungen, which were named after figures of German mythology (from north to south): Wotan, Siegfried, Alberich, Brunhild, and Kriemhild. The most powerful of these sections was Siegfried which stretched 160 kilometres from Lens to Reims. It was built in just five months thanks to a massive workforce of more than 500,000 labourers including German civilians and Russian prisoners of war. The defensive works comprised deep trenches (5 m deep, 4 m wide) and dugouts with bands of barbed wire entanglements at least twenty metres wide in front of the front line. The pillboxes and shelters were protected by reinforced concrete and sheets of steel. In addition, a line of more lightly defended outposts were built about three kilometres in front of the main line to slow down any Allied attack. The battle zone proper, which was about two kilometres deep, was covered by a massive bank of big guns and machine-guns perfectly positioned to eliminate

The text in italics, above, and the aerial photographs of the Hindenburg Line are from <http://www.remembrancetrails-northernfrance.com/history/the-battlefield/the-hindenburg-line.html>



THE CASUALTY LIST.

OFFICERS.

Connolly (Cheshire Regt.) Sec.-Lieut. J. S.
D'A. (Wounded.)

Le Mesurier (Cheshire Regt.) Capt. H. F. A.
(Wounded.)

Capstick (Cheshire Regt.), Second Lieut. H. P.
(wounded).

N.C.O.'s AND MEN.

Johnson (Cheshire Regt.) 255, J. E., Neston.
(Killed.)

The broad barbed wire entanglement in front of the Hindenburg Line near Heninel, 3 May 1917.

[<https://17thmanchesters.wordpress.com/afterwards/arras-hindenburg-line-heninel-23rd-april-1917/>]

WWI Service Medal and Award Rolls, 1914-1920 (extract) British War Medal and Victory Medal

[illegible]

Place

Date _____

I certify that according to the Official Records the individuals named in this ROLL are entitled to the Medal or Medals as detailed above.

For 0 1/c Records, No 2, Shrewsbury.

Signature and rank of Officer certifying.

