

75: Albert Connor Roberts

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Albert Connor Roberts

Rank: Private

Battalion / Regiment: 15th Coy. Machine Gun Corps (Infantry)

Service Number: 16293

Date of Death: 28 July 1916

Age at Death: 19

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

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of Thomas and Annie Metcalfe of Eldon Terrace, Neston

Albert Connor Roberts (Bert) was probably the illegitimate son of Jane Roberts.

On 25 December 1897 labourer Thomas Medcalfe ¹, 26, widower, married spinster Jane Roberts, 28, of Parkgate at Neston Parish Church.

Thomas Medcalfe, then 24, had married Elizabeth Ida Polden at Neston Parish Church on 28 September 1895; Elizabeth had been born in Tonbridge, Kent, but had come with her family to Neston where her father (Richard, deceased in 1895) was a groom/coachman.

Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter, baptised as Marion Una Medcalfe at Neston on 10 July 1896, but Elizabeth died shortly afterwards and was buried at Neston on 31 October 1896 aged 25. Daughter Marion did not survive and was buried at Neston, aged 14 months, on 2 September 1897. It was just three months later that Thomas married Jane Roberts.

Jane Roberts' father was blacksmith John Roberts of Birkenhead, although he was born in Llandrillo, near Corwen, Denbighshire [then Merionethshire]. John Roberts, who was twice married (first to Jane and then to Ellen), had a large family and Jane (who may have been baptised as Jane Anne) was the 6th of 14 children and was born in Llangadwaladr, then in Denbighshire, about 7 miles west of Oswestry.

In the 1901 census labourer Thomas Medcalfe (30, born Edge Hill) was shown as living on Eldon Terrace in Neston off the Burton Road although his wife was recorded as Mary (30, born North Wales). No one else was in the household and Albert has not been located elsewhere in the census - he was not with his grandparents John and Ellen Roberts in Brook Street, Birkenhead.

A daughter, Annie Eleanor, was born in mid-1902 and baptised (as Annie Helena) at Neston Parish Church on 13 July.

Albert's outline army records - his Service Records have not been located - state that he was born at Llangollen and that he lived at Pentrolen, Flintshire (location unknown); it may be that Jane returned to relatives in North Wales to give birth. Certainly, in 1911 Albert was recorded as 'son' to Jane and Thomas Medcalf(e):

¹ The surname Medcalfe was commonly shown as Medcalf, Metcalf, Metcalfe or Midcalf(e).

Number of Schedule 26
(To be filled up by the Enumerators
after collection.)

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

(To be filled up by the Enumerator.)			
I certify that—	Total		
	Males.	Females.	Persons.
(1) All the ages on this Schedule are entered in the proper age column.			
(2) I have entered the name and surname in Column 3, and a description.			
(3) After making the necessary inquiries I have completed all entries on the Schedule which appeared to be defective, and have returned such as appeared to be erroneous.			
Initials of Enumerator <i>J. H. J.</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>2</i>	<i>4</i>

Thomas Medcalf	41	labourer in coal mines, underground	born Edge Hill, Liverpool
Jane	40		born N. Wales
Annie	8		born Neston
Albert Roberts	14	no occupation recorded	born N. Wales, Flint

With only a brief outline of Albert's army career it is impossible to provide much information and all that is known for certain is that he enlisted in Birkenhead, initially into the Cheshire Regiment (Service Number 10167), and was then transferred to the Machine Gun Corps. He appears to have enlisted in the second week of the war.

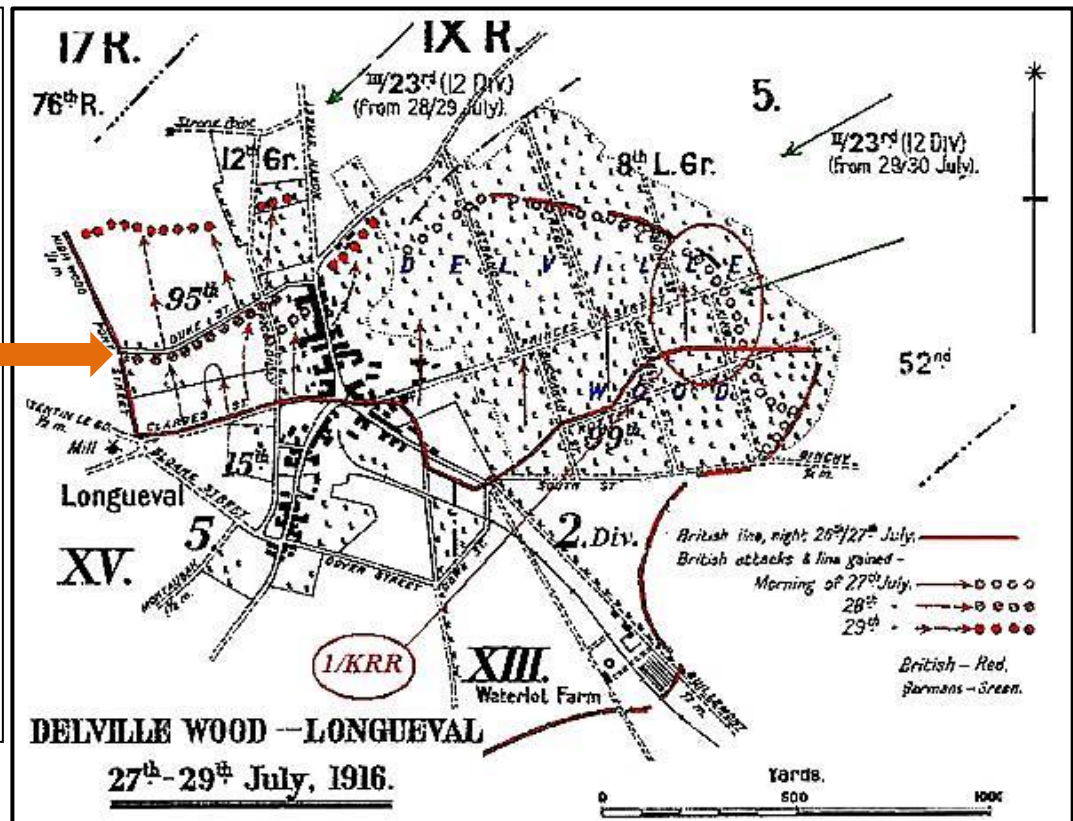
The 15th Machine Gun Company was formed from the Machine Gun Sections of the 15th Brigade, 5th Division on 27 December 1915.

In March 1916 the 5th Division took over a section of front line between St Laurent Blangy and the southern edge of Vimy Ridge, near Arras. They moved south in July to reinforce the Somme and were in action at High Wood, The Battle of Guillemont, The Battle of Flers-Courcelette, The Battle of Morval and The Battle of Le Transloy. The date of Albert's death - Friday 28 July 1916 - follows immediately after High Wood (14 - 17 July) and before The Battle of Guillemont (3 - 6 September 1916) and so it appears that he died in a more localised action. Indeed, the only known action of the 5th Division, on 28 July, was the taking of the line of 'Duke Street' at Delville Wood by 95 Brigade, and this was achieved with little opposition. It was reported at the time that *Conditions in the wood were now worse than ever. Most of us felt sick and ill even when unwounded. Food and water were very short and we had not the faintest idea when any more would be obtainable.*

Delville Wood lay immediately east of the village of Longueval and in this area English place names were used as these were more memorable than the correct French names.

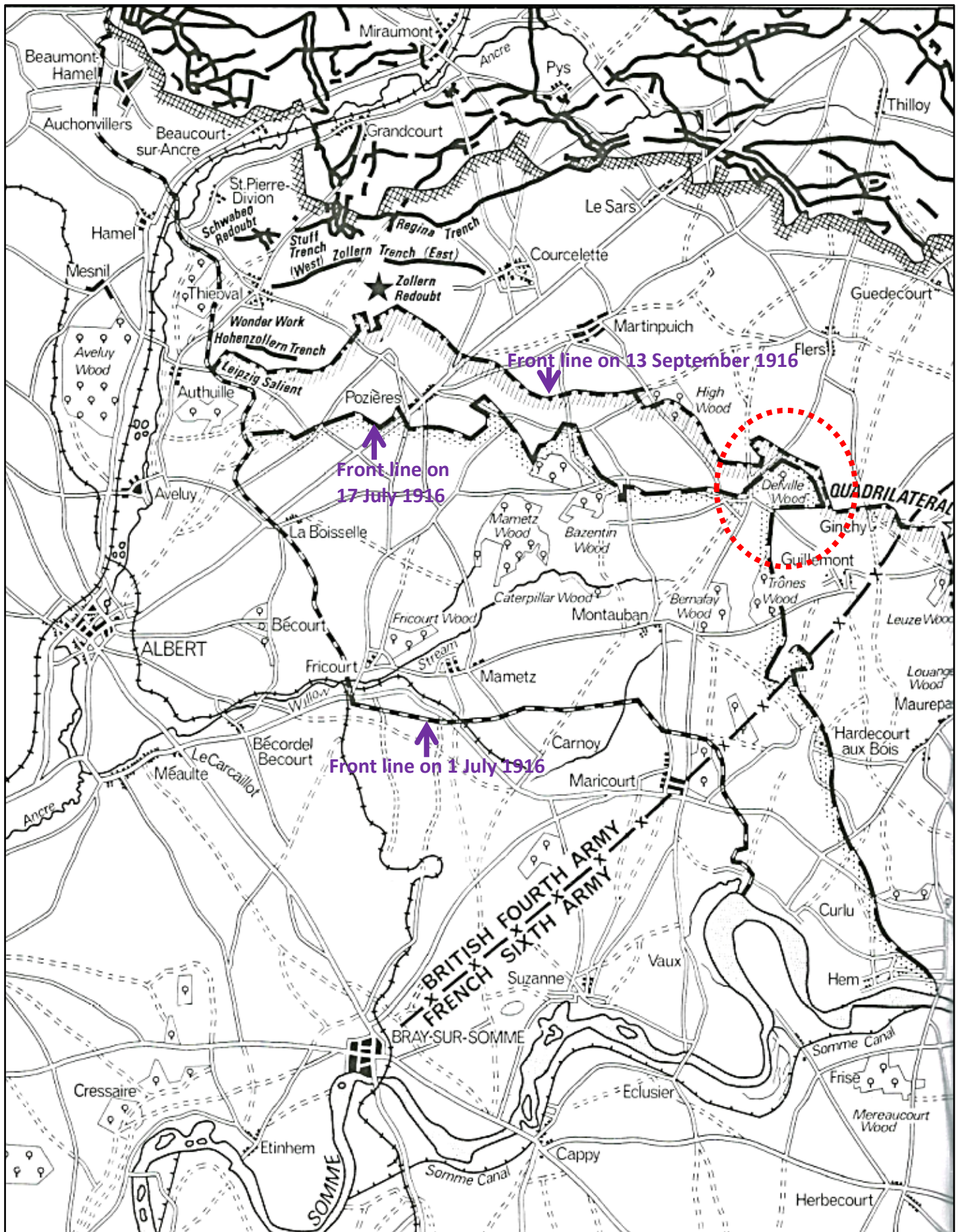
On this map the British lines and positions are shown in red.

This is the line, following Duke Street, taken by the 5th Division on 28 July 1916 moving north from the British line on Clarges Street. It is believed that it was in this vicinity that Albert Connor Roberts was killed. Encountering little opposition British troops progressed northwards the following day.



Delville Wood, July 1916

[Source: <http://www.advanceplacementhistory.com/general-history-enthusiasts/battle-of-delville-wood-14-july-3-september-1916.html>]



Albert Connor Roberts is believed to have died in the vicinity of Delville Wood, encircled in red, on 28 July 1916

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

Referring to this early part of the 1916 campaign on the Somme the Commonwealth War Graves Commission notes:

On 1 July 1916, supported by a French attack to the south, thirteen divisions of Commonwealth forces launched an offensive on a line from north of Gommecourt to Maricourt. Despite a preliminary bombardment lasting seven days, the German defences were barely touched and the attack met unexpectedly fierce resistance. Losses were catastrophic and with only minimal advances on the southern flank, the initial attack was a failure. In the following weeks, huge resources of manpower and equipment were deployed in an attempt to exploit the modest successes of the first day. However, the German Army resisted tenaciously and repeated attacks and counter attacks meant a major battle for every village, copse and farmhouse gained. At the end of September, Thiepval was finally captured. The village had been an original objective of 1 July. Attacks north and east continued throughout October and into November in increasingly difficult weather conditions. The Battle of the Somme finally ended on 18 November with the onset of winter.

NESTON MAN KILLED IN ACTION.



Official notification has been received by Mrs. T. Medcalf, Eldon-terrace, of the death in action of her son, Albert Connor Roberts. The first intimation came through a friend of his, who wrote: "I am sorry to tell you that Bert is killed. I had not time to write the day it happened. It has upset me very much. He was as good as a brother to me, and we were always together." Further information was not forthcoming until this week, when official news arrived, with the King and Queen's sympathy. Before enlisting, Roberts was employed by Mr. Patrick, of Leighton, but sacrificed all his prospects and joined the Cheshires in the second week of the War. He was afterwards transferred to a machine-gun section, and had been abroad over 12 months. It is only a short time since he was home on leave, and his mother received a cheery letter from him which was written only the day before his death. He was barely 20 years of age, and was a general favourite. The sympathy of the whole district is extended to his relatives in their great sorrow. He belonged to the Shepherds' Club, and the members propose to honour his memory, also that of Ratchiffe Hanley, by holding a memorial church parade.

Cheshire Observer - Saturday 26 August 1916

Liverpool Echo - Saturday 28 July 1917
The identity of Nancy is unknown but this remembrance notes that Albert's parents were living at 17 Eldon Terrace, Neston.

1916.—Fondly remembered by his Chum, (in France).
ROBERTS—In loving memory of our dear son, Albert Connah (Bert), who was killed in action, July 28, 1916.
His King and country called him;
That call was not in vain.
On Britain's roll of honour
You will find our hero's name.
Fondly remembered by his loving Father, Mother, and Nancy, 17, Eldon-terrace, Neston.

379013 Roberts 15. Dec 60 28. 7.16 London 19. 7. Dr Balance.

264 7/4 Albert M. G. 6 Thame 1916

Connor 98 162 93. In action

28. 6. 20 Mrs. Annie 9 Metcalfe

A. F. W. 5070 SENT DATE 19. 6. 19

WA. O. A. CITY Effects 19/20/1916 Transfer 158611 Regd. Paper 21/2010 Serial No. 12219654

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Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In June 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.

Albert Connor Roberts had no outstanding credit but the War Gratuity of £9 was paid to his mother. The total payment, £18 3s 2d, is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of about £2800 in 2016.

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

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regt. No.
ROBERTS	M. A. C.	Pte	16293
Albert Connor.	* - Chas R.	"	10167

Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	* MGC/101 B 11	1083	* K m F 28/7/16
BRITISH	"	"	
STAR			

Theatre of War first served in

Date of entry therein

E/264714/3

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920

As the Thiepval Memorial records those who were missing on The Somme, and who have no known grave, it is clear that Albert Roberts must have been recorded as 'missing in action'.

It does not seem that Thomas and Jane had further children and Annie Medcalfe, believed to be their only child, may have married Joseph Peers at a Civil Marriage in April / June 1932.

Jane Medcalfe (registered as Metcalfe), Albert's mother, died in mid-1949 aged 78.

Thomas Medcalfe (born 5 November 1870) died on 10 September 1961 aged 90; he was registered both as Metcalfe and Metcalf.)



In the 1939 Register he and Jane (born 13 April 1870) were living at 2 Lee's Yard, off Neston High Street. Thomas was then the caretaker of a church hall.

The small family headstone in Neston Parish Churchyard, which records both *Medcalfe* and *Metcalf* commemorates Albert C Roberts:

Jane Medcalfe
Also
Albert C. Roberts
Killed in Action in France
28 July 1916
Aged 20
Also
Thomas Metcalfe
Died 10 September 1961
Aged 90