

84: Bryn Atherton Brodie Thomas

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Bryn Atherton Brodie Thomas

Rank: 2nd Lieutenant

Battalion / Regiment: 13th Bn. The King's (Liverpool Regiment)

Service Number: ?

Date of Death: 16 August 1916

Age at Death: 19

Buried / Commemorated at: Guillemont Road Cemetery, Guillemont, Departement de la Somme, Picardie, France

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of Lt. Col. D. Brodie Thomas, O.B.E. and Mrs. Brodie Thomas, of "Thornbank," Lower Bourne, Farnham, Surrey. Native of Chester

The Thomas family had strong connections to the medical profession and the armed forces and, when Thomas enlisted in Liverpool on 2 September 1914, his address was The Willows, Neston. Curiously, this was the same address - and at around the same time - as the parents of Thomas Wilson Roberts who also died in WW1 and who had also served with The King's (Liverpool Regiment) [see [76: Thomas Wilson Roberts](#)].

Bryn was the second child of career soldier David Brodie Thomas and Gertrude. David was born in about 1863 in Llanelli, Carmarthenshire and in 1893 he married Gertrude Annie Atherton at Exeter Cathedral. Gertrude was born in about 1866 in Staffordshire.

David Brodie Thomas was educated at Epsom College, Surrey, from 1875-9 following in the footsteps of his father, Benjamin Thomas FRCS of Llanelli. Epsom College was founded in 1855 "to help orphans and widows of members of the medical profession" and the school was attended by at least three of David's brothers. Indeed, David's eldest brother, John Raglan Thomas (who attended Epsom College from 1869 to 1872) went on to study Medicine at St Bartholomew's Hospital where he graduated M.B. with Honours in midwifery. He went into general practice at Llanelli, where he was Medical Officer for Llanelli Rural District, and later in a practice at Exeter. Before this he was a Colonel in the Army Medical Services, Admiralty Surgeon, and Vice-President of the Naval and Military Branch of the British Medical Association. It is recorded that

'his service in connexion with the medical organisation of the Wessex Territorial Division was recognised by his appointment as Honorary Physician to H. M. King George V. He was an excellent marksman and competed at Bisley as a member of the team which won the China Cup for Devon in 1895'.

[www. <http://archive.epsomcollege.org.uk/>]

In the 1881 census David Brodie Thomas, 18, was a 2nd Lieutenant R.L.M. boarding at 5, Heathcote Street, St Pancras and in 1891, now serving with the 1st Battalion Cheshire Regiment, he was living with his unmarried brother, John Raglan Thomas, and unmarried sister Bridget in Exeter.

43	Upton Villas	1	David Brodie Thomas	Head	38	Capt. Cheshire Regt	Llanelli Carmarthenshire
			Gertrude A. J.	Wife	35		Pensnett Staffordshire
			Dorothy G. J.	Daughter	6		Ballary India
			Bryn A.B.	Son	4		Chester
			Bessie Heywood	Servant	28	Nurse (domestic)	Wetheridge Devon
			Martha	Servant	25	Cook (domestic)	Northop Flint

1901 census (extract) – Upton Villas, Upton by Chester [near Smoke Street, now Upton Lane]

David Brodie Thomas	38	Captain, Cheshire Regiment	born Llanelli (Llanelli), Carmarthenshire
Gertrude A.	35		born Pensnett, Staffs.
Dorothy G.	6		born Ballary, India
Bryn A.B.	4		born Chester
Bessie Heywood	28	nurse (domestic)	born Wetheridge, Devon
Martha	25	cook (domestic)	born Northop, Flint

In 1901, having married Gertrude, the family was living at Upton by Chester; David Brodie Thomas was now a Captain in the Cheshire Regiment and, as daughter Dorothy had been born in India, he had served overseas - and he was to return to India later.

Bryn Atherton Brodie Thomas was born on 1 February 1897 when the family lived at Meadows View, Dee Banks, Chester. At the time of the 1911 census Bryn, 14, was a boarding student at Wellington College, Crowthorne, Berkshire and his father, David Brodie Thomas (48) was a Major with the Cheshire Regiment at the Mount Abu Sanatorium, a hill station in Rajputana, north-western India. During the British rule in India it was a favourite summer destination of the British, who came here to escape the dusty, dry heat of the plains, particularly Rajasthan, and it also served as a sanatorium for the troops. David later became the Lieutenant Colonel (the Battalion commanding officer) of the 9th Battalion Leicestershire Regiment and, an unknown date, was awarded the OBE, an honour awarded also to his brother, Ivor Craddock Thomas. David Brodie Thomas died 1 Oct 1929 at Farnham, Surrey ¹.

SECOND-LIEUTENANT BRYN ATHERTON BRODIE THOMAS, the King's Liverpool Regiment, was killed in action on August 16th near Guillemont. He was in the Beresford 1910-12. At the outbreak of the War he enlisted as a private in the "Pals" Battalion King's Liverpool Regiment, and received his commission

in May, 1915. His Company Sergeant-Major wrote of him: "It was on the night of August 16th we went over to attack. When we had got about thirty yards we were compelled to take cover. We lay there for a few moments and then your brother jumped up and shouted 'Come on, lads.' The lads gallantly responded to the call, but before he had gone many yards he was killed by a bullet in the head. I have served out here for twelve solid months and I can assure you I never met a more game lad than your brother."



Imperial War Museum – HU118988 (part of *Bond of Sacrifice*, First World War Portraits Collection). The extract and photograph is believed to be from the Wellington College Year Book.

¹ In 1917 he served as Governor of No. 4 Military Prison-in-the-Field, British Expeditionary Force, France.

Without his Service Record we have no details of Bryn Atherton Brodie Thomas' army life although it appears that he enlisted as a Private in Liverpool on 2 September 1914, in the 18th Battalion The King's (Liverpool Regiment) - the 2nd City (Liverpool Pals) - , with the Service Number 17000. His age was recorded as 19 years 62 days and his address was The Willows, Neston. Bryn's occupation was clerk, he was 5ft 11ins tall, had a weight of 121lb (8stone 9lb / 55kg), had good physical development, a sallow complexion, blue eyes and dark brown hair.

Although it is not known how long Bryn stayed with the 18th Battalion, before his move to the 13th Battalion, it is known that he was discharged to a commission with the 18th on 8 April 1915 when he became a Temporary 2nd Lieutenant..

The 13th (Service) Battalion was formed at Seaforth in September 1914 as part of Kitchener's Third New Army and was attached as Army Troops to the 25th Division.

In February 1915 the battalion was transferred to the 76th Brigade in the same Division and on 27 September 1915 the troops landed at Le Havre.

On 15 October 1915 they transferred with the Brigade to the 3rd Division and, on 23 October 1915, transferred to the 8th Brigade in the same Division. On 4 April 1916 they transferred to the 9th Brigade in the 3rd Division. In 1916 they took part in The Actions of the Bluff and St Eloi Craters then moved to The Somme for The Battle of Albert, The Battle of Bazentin helping to capture Longueval, The Battle of Delville Wood and The Battle of the Ancre.

It was during the conflicts, involving Anglo-French forces, and leading up to The Battle of Guillemont (3 - 6 September 1916), that Bryn Thomas was killed.

On 23 July, Haig ordered the Fourth Army to capture the German front-line, as a preliminary to another general attack. XIII Corps was ordered to capture the German second position, from Falfemont Farm to Guillemont, during the next French attack on the north bank. Rawlinson and Foch met on 24 July and postponed the joint attack to 27 July, for more artillery preparation due to the poor visibility, as the French continued the "terrific" bombardment which had begun on 22 July. Meetings between Rawlinson, Fayolle, Foch and Haig continued to try to plan a combined attack, which was eventually arranged for 30 July but also had several zero hours. The 30th Division was to attack through the 35th Division positions, from Falfemont Farm to Guillemont and the 2nd Division to attack from Waterlot Farm at 4:45 a.m., as the only French attack took place from the river to Maurepas. The failure was similar to that of 23 July and was ascribed to the difficulty of attacking from the south-west and west, especially with no French attack over the head of the Maurepas ravine, north of the village. Most of the ground captured by the French was lost to German counter-attacks.

The British postponed their attack to 8 August, reduced the depth of the objective and made six "Chinese" attacks on 7 August, to inflict losses and mislead the defenders. The attack differed little from previous attempts, although careful briefings were conducted and elaborate measures taken to maintain communication, using contact-patrol aircraft to observe ground flares, mirrors, lamps and panels. Visual signalling posts and relay posts for runners were prepared and messenger-pigeons taken forward. Infantry wore shiny tin discs on the back of their equipment, to be visible from the air and a wireless station was set up near Favière Wood. Visual signalling still failed again during the attack, due to mist, dust and smoke. Congestion in the British trenches in front of Trones Wood, made

a fresh attack impossible until next day. On 9 August, some battalions had not arrived by zero hour, the attacks failed and British troops isolated in Guillemont were overwhelmed and captured.

Rawlinson discussed the situation with the commanders of the 55th, 2nd and 24th divisions and ordered that the next attack must be thoroughly prepared. Haig intervened to urge no delay on strategic grounds and discussed the problem posed by German defenders hiding in shell-holes and the débris of the village. Rawlinson met Fayolle later, to discuss the combined attack due on 11 August. On 10 August, XIII Corps reported that the attack would be ready by 17 August. The day was misty and rainy, which grounded aircraft and led to the attack being postponed for a day and ground taken by an advance of two companies of the 55th Division was abandoned, after the French attack was repulsed. Foch and Rawlinson met on 13 August, to plan an operation in which XIV Corps would attack Guillemont, after the French captured Maurepas and Angle Wood, followed by an attack by XIV Corps on Wedge Wood and Falfemont Farm, at dawn on 19 August. A combined attack on 22 August, from Le Forêt to Bois Douage by the French, prolonged from Leuze Wood to Ginchy by the British, was also arranged. Rawlinson and Fayolle agreed a preliminary attack for 16 August, from Angle Wood to south of Guillemont, which took place in hot weather, with special arrangements for counter-battery fire and communication. The British and French made a small advance but most of the captured ground was lost to a counter-attack overnight.

The plan for the combined attack on 18 August, was drastically changed after the 16 August failure, with Rawlinson and Fayolle arranging to capture Guillemont in two days, as the French concentrated on taking Angle Wood and preparing for an attack on 22 August. A methodical bombardment for 36 hours was planned, with no increase in the rate of shelling before the attack and a field artillery "curtain" of fire was to precede the infantry, by dropping back from the German front line to no man's land 100 yards (91 m) in front of the British troops, then moving forward at 50 yards (46 m) per minute. The attack was to occur in two stages, with a two-hour pause for consolidation before the final advance. The day was dull and showery, the French attack was repulsed but British troops took parts of the first objective west of Falfemont Farm and west and north-west of Guillemont, as far as the station. On 20 August, Rawlinson met the corps commanders, discussed the policy of "relentless pressure" laid down by Haig and arranged an attack on the west side of Guillemont for 21 August.

Guillemont and Ginchy lay on spurs, which constricted the British right flank and commanded the ground to the south, in the French Sixth Army area. During the time when the German third line and intermediate lines and redoubts, were being completed on the rear slopes of Bazentin Ridge, Allied attacks had become smaller and periods of wet weather, the terrain, supply and ammunition difficulties, combined with the German policy of unyielding defence and the reinforcements reaching the German 1st and 2nd armies, slowed the Anglo-French advance, particularly south of the Somme. The German second line ran north-west, from the French sector near Maurepas to Wedge Wood, behind Arrow Head Copse, in front of Guillemont, past the station and thence to Delville Wood and Longueval, before turning sharply west. The approaches to the village were bare and overlooked by German posts in Leuze Wood. A quarry west of the village and the ground to the south, from Maltzhorn Farm to Angle Wood and Falfemont Farm had been fortified.

The Germans were able to nullify much of the Anglo-French material superiority in the battle, particularly during the periods of cold and wet weather in late July and late August. The defence was as piecemeal as British attacks but with the French exposed to converging artillery-fire, on the Flaucourt Plateau south of the Somme and the British bogged down on Bazentin Ridge, the Germans used observation posts around Guillemont and High Wood, to observe fire into the salients around Maurepas and Guillemont from three sides. Poor weather was less of a handicap to the Germans, while they held such commanding ground. Positions were linked with more support and reserve trenches, behind the second position south and east of Delville Wood and new "switch trenches" dug

oblique to forward lines, were used to prevent Anglo-French infantry from "rolling up" German defences, from an isolated penetration.

German field fortifications continued to be defended by machine-gun fire, artillery-fire and swift local counter-attacks, extra heavy artillery brought from Verdun, was used to extend bombardments beyond the Allied front line, to artillery positions and supply routes. New German defensive works were harder to spot, during the fewer periods of good flying weather, often not being revealed until attacking infantry were engaged from them. The Germans also gained an advantage, from being forced back, as the area most devastated by artillery-fire grew wider and was on the Allied side, which created chronic problems in transporting supplies to the front line, periodically made worse by downpours, which turned roads and tracks into glissades of mud. It was far easier for supplies to be brought up to the German front line, as it was pushed back along supply lines that had been established for two years.

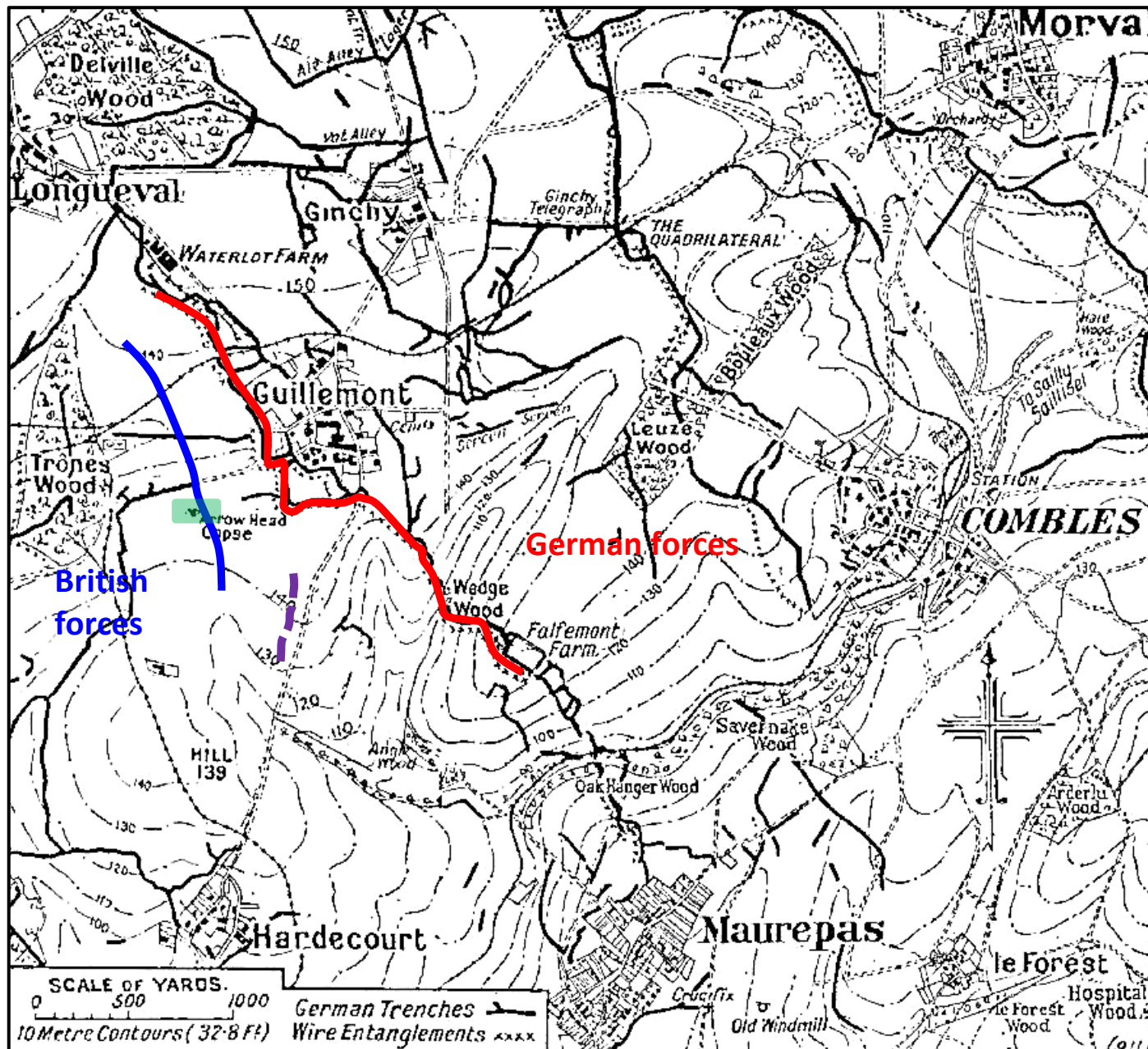
[Adapted from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Battle_of_Guillemont]

The War Diary of the 13th King's (Liverpool Regiment) has the following:

Report on the operations between 15th and 20th August 1916 in which the 13th KLR were engaged.

On the 13th August 1916 the above Battalion was ordered from the SANDPITS to move up into the front line and to assist in an attack on a position between the south of the village of GUILLEMONT on the left to WEDGE WOOD on the right. Their position was the point assigned to the whole (9th) Brigade. This Battalion had a section of their front from the left of the T track (T25c) 57CSW to B1A 06 (62CNW). We had the Royal Fusiliers on our left flank and the King's Own on our right flank. The front line of trenches was held by 2 Companies of my Battalion with two Companies in support in trenches behind the two Companies in the front line. Went into their trenches on the morning of the 14th where they were employed in digging and strengthening their trenches and also improving the trenches on the right portion of the position – this they were at until the morning of the 16th.

The two Companies in support came up into their support trenches on the morning of the 16th. They had previously camped at TALUS BOISE. The attack was ordered for 5.40pm on the 16th inst. and my orders for attack was 'A' and 'B' Companies in front and second lines, 'C' and 'D' Companies in support, third and fourth lines, and in this formation they advanced over the parapet. 'A' Company's line of advance (on the left) was 4.9(T.25.c.4.9) map 57SW. 'B' Company's line of advance was LONELY Trench. They had instructions to keep touch with each other and also with those on the flanks and to advance as far as possible in a general line and to be very careful to afford mutual support wherever required; 'C' and 'D' Companies (in support) received similar orders. The attack itself was well planned but unfortunately our artillery fire (although extremely intense) was not evidently directed on the correct places, for as soon as the men rose over the parapet of their trenches they were met by a murderous machine-gun fire from the flanks and front, which it was quite impossible to get through, with the result that practically no progress could be made and the casualties were extremely heavy. My men faced the position most gallantly (as the casualties show) but their task was impossible, and although the supports bravely backed the first line up it was useless and impossible to advance, and they had to fall back into their original front line, where they remained until relieved by the West Yorks. On the 17th inst. when the Battalion occupied the Swanson and Maltz Horn trenches. I forgot to mention that on the 17th our front line trenches were heavily shelled by our own artillery, which I am sorry to say, caused forty casualties in the Battalion. We also received messages on the 16th that shells were falling in our support trenches. We held the communication trenches before-mentioned till relieved by the 2nd Royal Scots at 2.0pm on the 18th last when we moved to Talus Boise and there went



The approximate British (blue) and German (red) front line positions in August 1916 south of Delville Wood and Longueval. The positions of Arrow Head Copse (highlighted in green) and the German-held Lonely Trench (broken purple line) are indicated and are referred to in the account. A section of this map is shown in more detail on a following page.

[https://www.google.co.uk/search?hl=en&site=imghp&tbn=isch&source=hp&biw=1536&bih=879&q=Guillemont+August+1916&oq=Guillemont+August+1916&gs_l=img.1]

into bivouacs for the night and moved into trenches near Carnoy on the 19th morning and remained till relieved the same evening, when we moved to the Citadel for the night of the 19th. On the morning of the 21st we moved to Ville-sur-Ancre, where we are at present.

The only remarks I have to make on the above operations are that I consider that the position we had to attack was insufficiently reconnoitered beforehand, and that the enemy's positions were insufficiently [--?--] by artillery fire : the most essential places to be demolished by their fire appear to have been left alone with the result that the infantry came in for their machine gun fire when they advanced to attack. Attacks of this description require a long and thorough reconnaissance beforehand and take several days artillery bombardment in order to ensure that the points of attack had been broken up, otherwise the infantry advance is useless. The attack on the 14th July was carefully arranged beforehand with the result that it was a great success.

Major C. H. Seton OC 13KLR 22 August 1916

Yet another account of the action in which Bryn Thomas died - recorded as The Fourth Attack on Guillemont – was made by Everard Wyrall in his description of the action involving the 13th Battalion The King's (Liverpool Regiment) around this time:

THE FOURTH ATTACK

13th Battalion

Hardly had the 3rd Division taken over the line from the 55th Division on the night of the 14th/15th August when the former was ordered to prepare for another attack (the fourth) on Guillemont, the attack to take place on the 16th. The 76th Brigade was to be on the right and the 9th Brigade on the left, the 8th Brigade in reserve. Of the 9th Brigade the 13th King's were to attack on the right and the 4th Royal Fusiliers on the left.

The frontage of attack allotted to the 3rd Division was practically a semi-circle running from the ravine on the right (to be attacked by the French) to a German strong point in the sunken road just east of Arrow Head Copse.^a Within this semi-circle the assaulting troops of the two brigades were to go forward, open to enfilade fire from both flanks, and (from what was certain to be heavy fire) from a double line of trenches in front. The French were attacking the Ravine and Angle Wood on the right, and the 24th Division was to assault the enemy's positions on the left of the 3rd Division.

"It had now become evident, however," relates the official despatches after the failure of the previous attack, "that Guillemont could not be captured as an isolated enterprise without very heavy loss, and accordingly, arrangements were made with the French Army on our immediate right for a series of combined attacks to be delivered in progressive stages, which should embrace Maurepas, Falfemont Farm, Guillemont, Leuze Wood and Ginchy."

The sketch maps with the Brigade and Divisional Diaries demonstrate the difficult nature of the task before the 3rd Division, for the whole of the Divisional front bulged outwards. Just north of the left of the left flank of the division the enemy's trenches ran almost from east to west. Opposite the centre was an advanced German trench with open flanks—Lonely Trench it was called—irregularly sited, difficult to observe, and could not, in its most important parts, be bombarded by our heavy artillery without clearing our own front line of troops. This trench was known to be strongly held by infantry with numerous machine guns and protected by wire entanglements. The northern half of this trench was in the line of the attack of the 13th King's.

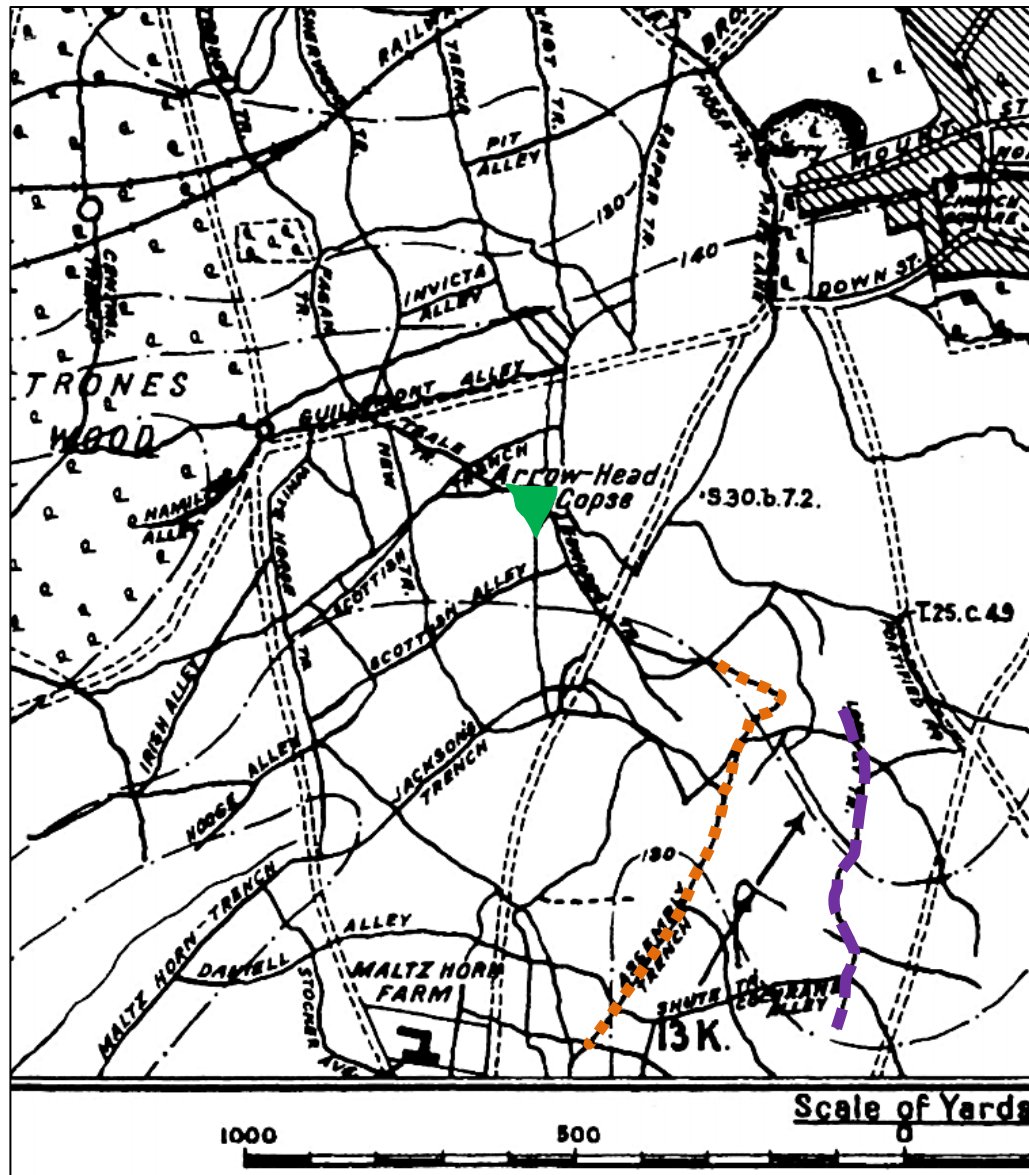
13th Battalion

At "Zero" hour the battalion held the following positions: "B" Company was in Assembly Trench with "C" Company in rear in Edward Trench; "A" was in "T" Trench with "D" Company in Harrison Trench. "A" and "B" Companies had been ordered to go forward in half companies, the remaining half companies following at from sixty to eighty yards distance.

The attack was launched punctually at 5.40 p.m., and once again into the inferno the King's men went. The Battalion Diary gives no details of the attack, the only entry therein on 16th August being "Made attack on German lines south of Guillemont. Casualties heavy."

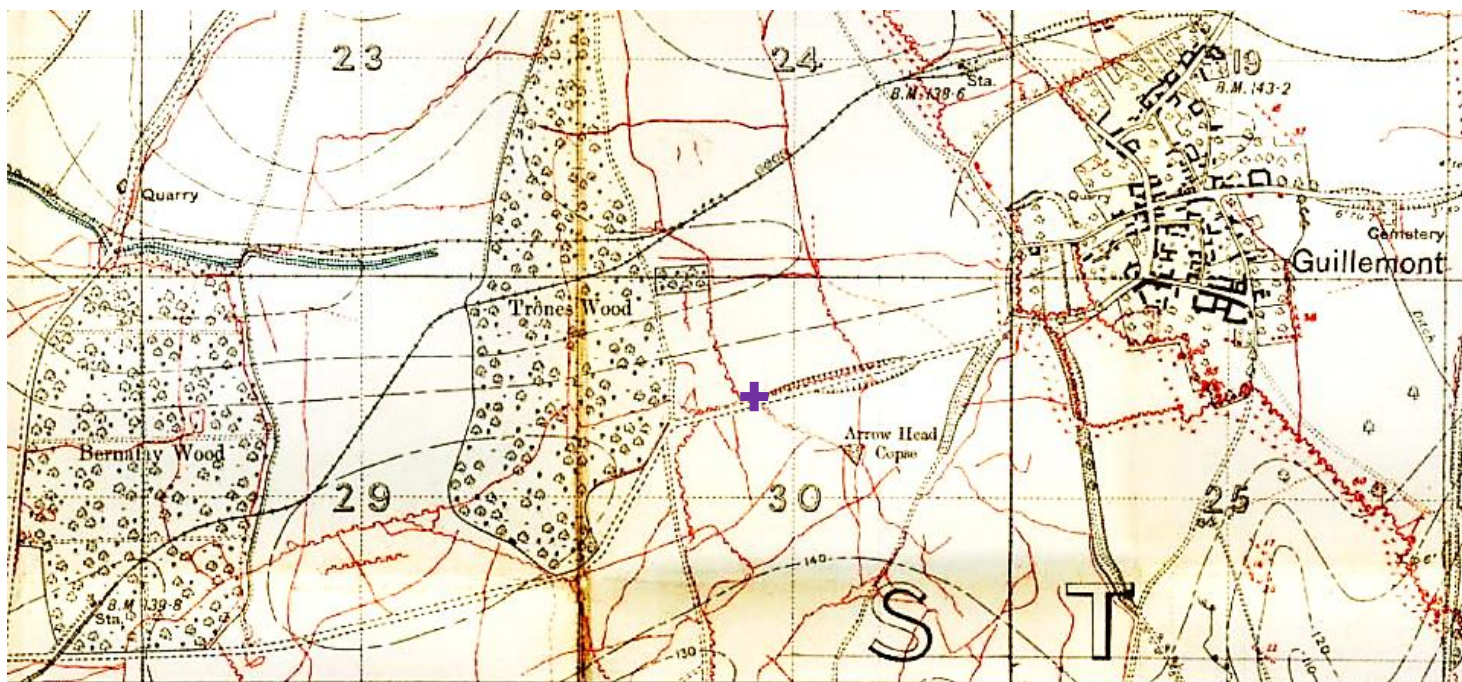
16th August

[Text and following map (adapted) from: *The History of the King's Regiment (Liverpool), 1914 – 1919 vol. 11 (1916 - 1917)* Everard Wyrall Edward Arnold & Co., London First published 1928]



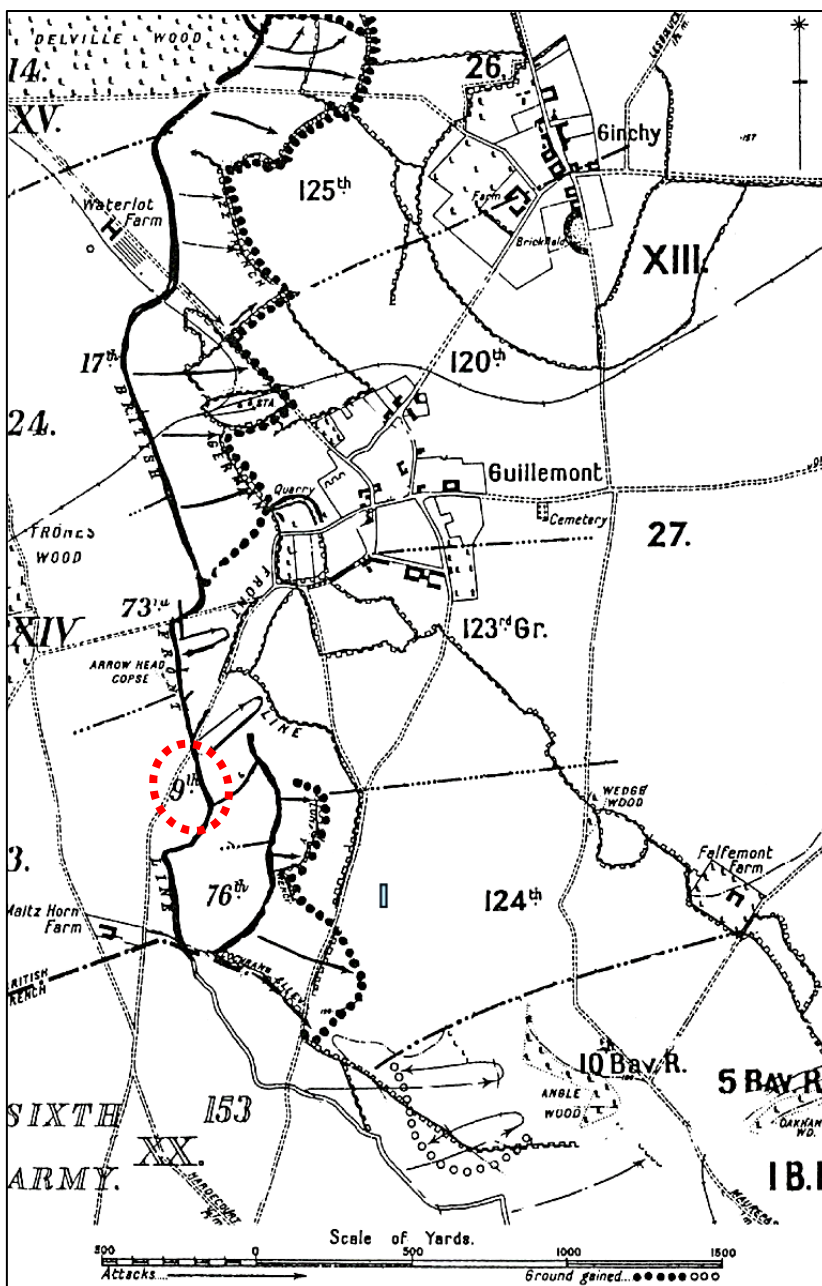
Sketch map of the area south-west of Guillemont showing the main trenches on 16 August 1916.

The location of Arrow Head Copse is shown in green, the German-held Lonely Trench in purple and Assembly Trench, occupied by 'B' Company of the 13th Battalion The King's (Liverpool) Regiment is indicated by the broken orange line. The town of Guillemont is shown in part in the north-east of this map.



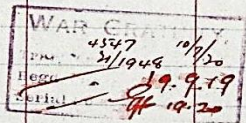
German trench systems near Guillemont on 15 September 1916. The location of Guillemont Road Cemetery, where Bryn Atherton Brodie Thomas was buried, and close to where he died, is indicated by the purple cross.

[<https://17thmanchesters.wordpress.com/guillemont/>]



The military situation around Guillemont on 18 August 1916, two days after Bryn Thomas died. The position of the 9th Brigade, to the immediate west of the British front line south of Arrow Head Copse, has been encircled in red. It is believed that it was here that Bryn Thomas was killed in action [Source: *The Somme : The Day-by-Day Account* Chris McCarthy Arms & Armour Press 1993

1828451528/3	Thomas	Liverpool	16-8-16	Coy. Co.	9/1/21	4	18	11	✓
	2 Lieut.	B. A. B.	Regt.	In action	10/16.	1	8	=	✓
					9/16.	1	14	4	✓
					20/1/14	64	2	6	
				Transferred 509					



Army Registers of Soldiers' Effects, 1901-1929

In Summer 1919 the army paid outstanding credits – mainly remaining wages – to soldiers or, in the case of those who had died, their family or nominated representatives. At the same time a War Gratuity was often paid. In July 1919 Bryn received four payments of outstanding wages - £72 6s 9d - from the army and a War Gratuity of £5. This, a total value of £77 6s 9d, is equivalent to a *labour value* (wages) of around £12 000 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.

SECOND LIEUT. B. A. B. THOMAS.

Second Lieut. Bryn Atherton Brodie Thomas, King's (Liverpool Regiment), killed, was the only son of Major D. Brodie Thomas (late of the Cheshire Regiment). He was born in February, 1897, and was educated at The Leas, Hoylake, and Wellington College, Berks. At the outbreak of war he enlisted as a private, and received his commission in April, 1915.

Chester Chronicle - Saturday
2 September 1916

Bryn Atherton Brodie Thomas was buried at Guillemont Road Cemetery, a short distance south-west of Guillemont.

Guillemont was an important point in the German defences at the beginning of the Battle of the Somme in July 1916. It was taken by the 2nd Royal Scots Fusiliers on 30 July but the battalion was obliged to fall back, and it was again entered for a short time by the 55th (West Lancashire) Division on 8 August. On 18 August, the village was reached by the 2nd Division, and on 3 September (in the Battle of Guillemont) it was captured and cleared by the 20th (Light) and part of the 16th (Irish) Divisions. It was lost in March 1918 during the German advance, but retaken on 29 August by the 18th and 38th (Welsh) Divisions. The cemetery was begun by fighting units (mainly of the Guards Division) and field ambulances after the Battle of Guillemont, and was closed in March 1917.

[CWGC]

Gertrude A Thomas, Bryn's mother, may have died, aged 75, in mid-1950 in Surrey. She has not been located in the 1939 Register.

Bryn Atherton Brodie Thomas had two sisters, neither of whom has been located in the 1939 Register - although they had lived previously at 22 Cartwright Gardens, St Pancras, London, they were not at that address in 1939:

Dorothy Gwyneth Brodie Thomas (born 1894) remained unmarried and, on 17 August 1940, was appointed as 887101 Aircraftwoman 2nd Class in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force. It is not certain when she died.

Audrey Gwendolyne Brodie Thomas (born 2 November 1895) remained unmarried and she died in the Bristol region in late 1972.