

90: Wallace Williams

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: Wallace Williams
 Rank: Private
 Battalion / Regiment: 13th Bn. Cheshire Regiment
 Service Number: W/141 Date of Death: 07 July 1916 Age at Death: ?
 Buried / Commemorated at: Thiepval Memorial, Thiepval, Departement de la Somme, Picardie, France
 Additional information given by CWGC: None

The inscribed memorial in Neston Parish Church identifies him as W. Williams to distinguish him from the entry which follows, WM [William] Williams.

Wallace Williams was the eighth, of ten, children of Neston joiner William and Ellen Williams and he was baptised at Neston 8 September 1897.

Joiner William Williams married Ellen Bell of Parkgate at Our Lady & St Nicholas & St Anne, the Liverpool Parish Church, in April / June 1880 and their first child, John Samuel Williams, was born very shortly afterwards. Ellen was the daughter of agricultural labourer Samuel and Ann Bell; Samuel had died by 1871 but the family was then living on Poplar Weint off Park Street, Neston.

By the time of the 1901 census William and Ellen's family was complete and they were living on Gladstone Road, Neston:

113 Gladstone Rd	1			William Williams	Head	M	42	Joiner building trade	born Chester
				Ellen Williams	Wife	F	38		born Parkgate
				John S.	Son	M	20	bricklayer	born Neston
				Mabel	Daughter	F	19	domestic servant	born Neston
				Eliza Jane	Daughter	F	17	domestic servant	born Neston
				Thomas W.	Son	M	14		born Neston
				George	Son	M	12		born Neston
				Alfred B.	Son	M	9		born Neston
				Harold	Son	M	7		born Neston
				Wallace	Son	M	5		born Neston
				Ethel	Daughter	F	3		born Neston
				Ernest W.	Son	M	infant		born Neston

1901 census (extract) – 3, Gladstone Road, Neston

William Williams	42	joiner, building trade	born Chester
Ellen	38		born Parkgate
John S.	20	bricklayer	born Neston
Mabel	19	domestic servant	born Neston
Eliza Jane	17	domestic servant	born Neston
Thomas W.	14		born Neston
George	12		born Neston
Alfred B.	9		born Neston
Harold	7		born Neston
Wallace	5		born Neston
Ethel	3		born Neston
Ernest W.	infant		born Neston

This census records all the 10 children of the marriage.

The baptismal dates for the ten children are:

John Samuel	8 August 1880
Mabel	30 December 1881
Eliza Jane	22 February 1884
Thomas William	17 September 1886
George	22 March 1889
Alfred Burnaby	24 April 1891 (born 6 April 1890)
Harold	2 December 1892
Wallace	8 September 1895
Ethel	10 April 1898
Ernest Wolfram	11 November 1900 (born 26 September 1900)

By the time of the 1911 census the family was living on Raby Road:

CENSUS OF ENGLAND AND WALES, 1911.																	
Before writing on this Schedule please read the Examples and the Instructions given on the other side of the paper, as well as the headings of the Columns. The entries should be written in Ink.																	
The contents of the Schedule will be treated as confidential. Strict care will be taken that no information is disclosed with regard to individual persons. The returns are not to be used for proof of age, as in connection with Old Age Pensions, or for any other purpose than the preparation of Statistical Tables.																	
NAME AND SURNAME	RELATIONSHIP to Head of Family	AGE (last Birthday) and SEX	PARTICULARS as to MARRIAGE				PROFESSION or OCCUPATION of Persons aged ten years and upwards				BIRTHPLACE of every person		NATIONALITY of every Person born in a Foreign Country	INFIRMITY			
<p>of every Person, whether Member of Family, Visitor, Boarder, or Servant, who</p> <p>(1) passed the night of Sunday, April 2nd, 1911, in this dwelling and was alive at midnight, or</p> <p>(2) arrived in this dwelling on the morning of Monday, April 3rd, not having been enumerated elsewhere.</p> <p>No one else must be included.</p> <p>(For order of entries see Examples on back of Schedule.)</p>																	
		For Infants under one year state the age in months as "under one month," "one month," etc.	Write "Single," "Married," "Widower," or "Widow" opposite the names of all persons aged 15 years and upwards.	State, for each Married Woman entered on this Schedule, the number of—	Children born alive to present Marriage. (If no children born alive write "None" in Column 7.)		Total Children Born Alive.		Children still Living.	Children who have Died.	Personal Occupation.	Industry or Service with which worker is connected.	Whether Employed, Worker, or Working on Own Account.	Whether Working at Home.	<p>(1) If born in the United Kingdom, write the name of the County, and Town or Parish.</p> <p>(2) If born in any other part of the British Empire, write the name of the Dependency, Colony, etc., and of the Province or State.</p> <p>(3) If born in a Foreign Country, write the name of the Country.</p> <p>(4) If born at sea, write "At Sea."</p> <p>NOTE.—In the case of persons born elsewhere than in England or Wales, state whether "Resident" or "Visitor" in this Country.</p>		State whether— (1) "British subject by parentage," (2) "Naturalized British subject," giving year of naturalization. (3) "Lunatic," (4) "Insane," (5) "Feeble-minded," (6) "Deaf and Dumb," (7) "Totally Blind," (8) "Totally Deaf," (9) "Totally Paralyzed," (10) "Totally Stupid," (11) "Totally Blind and Deaf," (12) "Totally Blind and Paralyzed," (13) "Totally Blind and Stupid," (14) "Totally Deaf and Paralyzed," (15) "Totally Deaf and Stupid," (16) "Totally Blind, Deaf, and Paralyzed," (17) "Totally Blind, Deaf, and Stupid," (18) "Totally Blind, Deaf, and Paralyzed."
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	
William Williams	Head	52	Married	31	10	10				Joiner	210	Builder	At Home	Cheshire Neston	British		
Ellen Williams	Wife	48	Married	31	10	10				None			At Home	Cheshire Parkgate	British		
George Williams	Son	23	Single							Labourer	350		At Home	Cheshire Neston	British		
Alfred Burnaby	Son	21	Single							Groom (Domestic)	100		At Home	Cheshire Neston	British		
Harold Williams	Son	18	Single							Van Boy	525	Baker	At Home	Cheshire Neston	British		
Wallace Williams	Son	15	Single							Van Boy	525	Baker	At Home	Cheshire Neston	British		
Ethel Williams	Daughter	13	Single							Scholar	390		At Home	Cheshire Neston	British		
Ernest Wolfram	Son	10	Single										At Home	Cheshire Neston	British		

1911 census (condensed) – 7 Raby Terrace, Raby Road, Neston

William Williams	52	joiner	born Neston
Ellen	48		born Parkgate
George	23	labourer, general	born Neston
Alfred Burnaby	21	groom, domestic	born Neston
Harold	18	van boy (Baker)	born Neston
Wallace	15	van boy (Baker)	born Neston
Ethel	13	scholar	born Neston
Ernest Wolfram	10		born Neston

William and Ellen had been married for 31 years and all ten of their children had survived.

John Samuel Williams had married Maud Stewart of Hawarden at St Bridget's Church, Chester in early 1902 and in 1911, with their four children, they were living at 38 Westray Street, Carlin How, Cleveland (then Yorkshire). John was a bricklayer at the steelworks - the iron and steel agglomeration at Skinningrove employed many of the local population.

Eliza Jane Williams, John's sister, was living in the same household; she was 26 and a self-employed laundress.

Mabel Williams has not been located in the 1911 census but Thomas William Williams, 24, was a groom boarding in Puddington.

Although the Service Record of Wallace Williams has not been located it is believed that he enlisted in Port Sunlight and that he was killed in action on 7 July 1916 whilst serving with the 13th Battalion Cheshire Regiment.

The 13th (Service) Battalion was, unofficially, known as the Wirral Battalion, and was formed at Port Sunlight on 1 September 1914 by Gershom Stewart, MP. The battalion moved to Chester and, on October 1914, came under the orders of the 74th Brigade in the 25th Division. By December 1914 the troops were in billets in Bournemouth before moving to Aldershot in May 1915. They embarked for France on 25 September 1915.

From 1 - 17 July the 13th Battalion were in action on The Somme at The Battle of Albert, a series of slow and costly British attacks around the newly-won Montauban Ridge in an attempt to secure the flanks for a later major assault on the German second line positions. In a succession of bloody encounters the Fourth Army sought to secure Trônes Wood, Mametz Wood and Contalmaison; operations characterised by vicious hand to hand fighting, within devastated villages and shell-thrashed woods riddled with concealed strongpoints.

The 75th Brigade, with some supporting units, received orders on 2 July to move to Martinsart, and came under the orders of the 32nd Division.

Heavy rain on 3 and 4 July produced the first quantities of the infamous Somme mud and hinted at the difficulties which terrain and weather would pose later in the campaign. On 2 July Fricourt was occupied by British troops; 3 July saw the failure of the British attacks at Ovillers and Thiepval and La Boisselle was captured after much fierce counter-attacking between 4 - 6 July. Offensive operations began on 7 July, the day on which Wallace Williams was killed in action, to capture Mametz Wood, Contalmaison and Ovillers. [Adapted from the CWGC account].

The account of the action on Friday 7 July, a day which was overcast and showery, can be summarised (the War Diaries for the 13th Bn. Cheshire Regiment are unavailable):

The 13th Battalion, commanded by Colonel L.H.K. Finch, was employed on the 7th July, under the 12th Division against Ovillers. Jumping-off trenches had been contrived from the newly-won German trenches in La Boisselle. These trenches formed a salient in the German line and our attack ran parallel to the British and German fronts, the Germans still holding trenches flanking the line of advance from La Boisselle to Ovillers. The village was below the crest from the front, but was in view from our starting line.

It had been arranged that the attack should be protected by smoke and by an intense barrage. But there was no smoke and our men thought the barrage particularly feeble. It is probable that, as the wind dropped, the smoke rose at once. Our advance, being thus unscreened, drew heavy artillery fire. This fire, together with machine gun fire from front and flanks, stopped the attack about half way to Ovillers. The Loyal North Lancashires on our right lost heavily, the loss in officers being particularly severe. The 13th Battalion lost eight officers killed, Major J.C. Metcalfe,

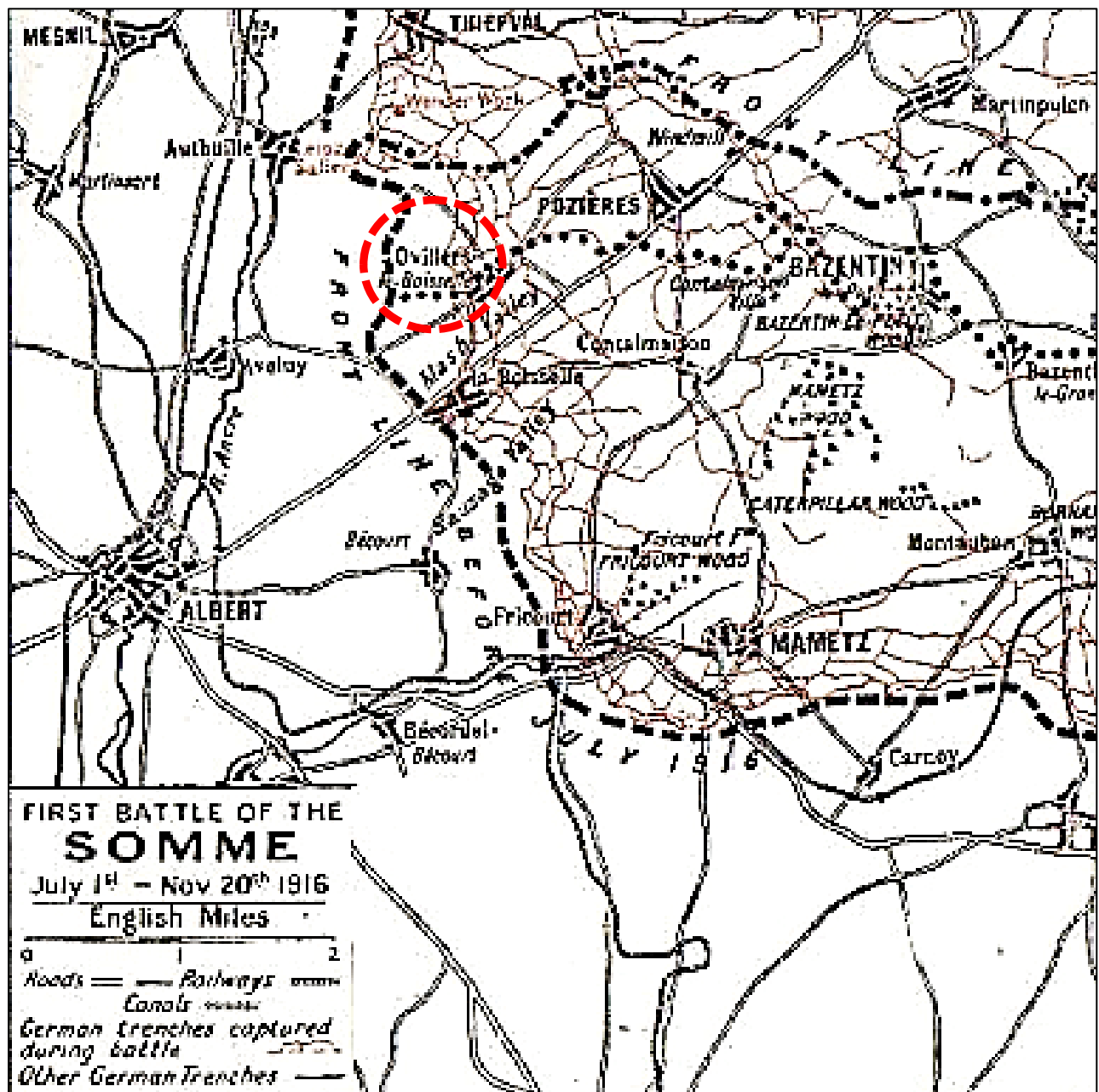
Captain and Adjutant W.E. Davy, Captain F.G. Hall, Lieutenants Fitzroy Somerset, H.F. Stevenson, D.A. Stewart, 2nd Lieuts. A.E. Cotton and C.M. Bellis. Colonel Finch and eleven other officers were wounded. 243 N.C.O.s and men were killed or wounded.

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

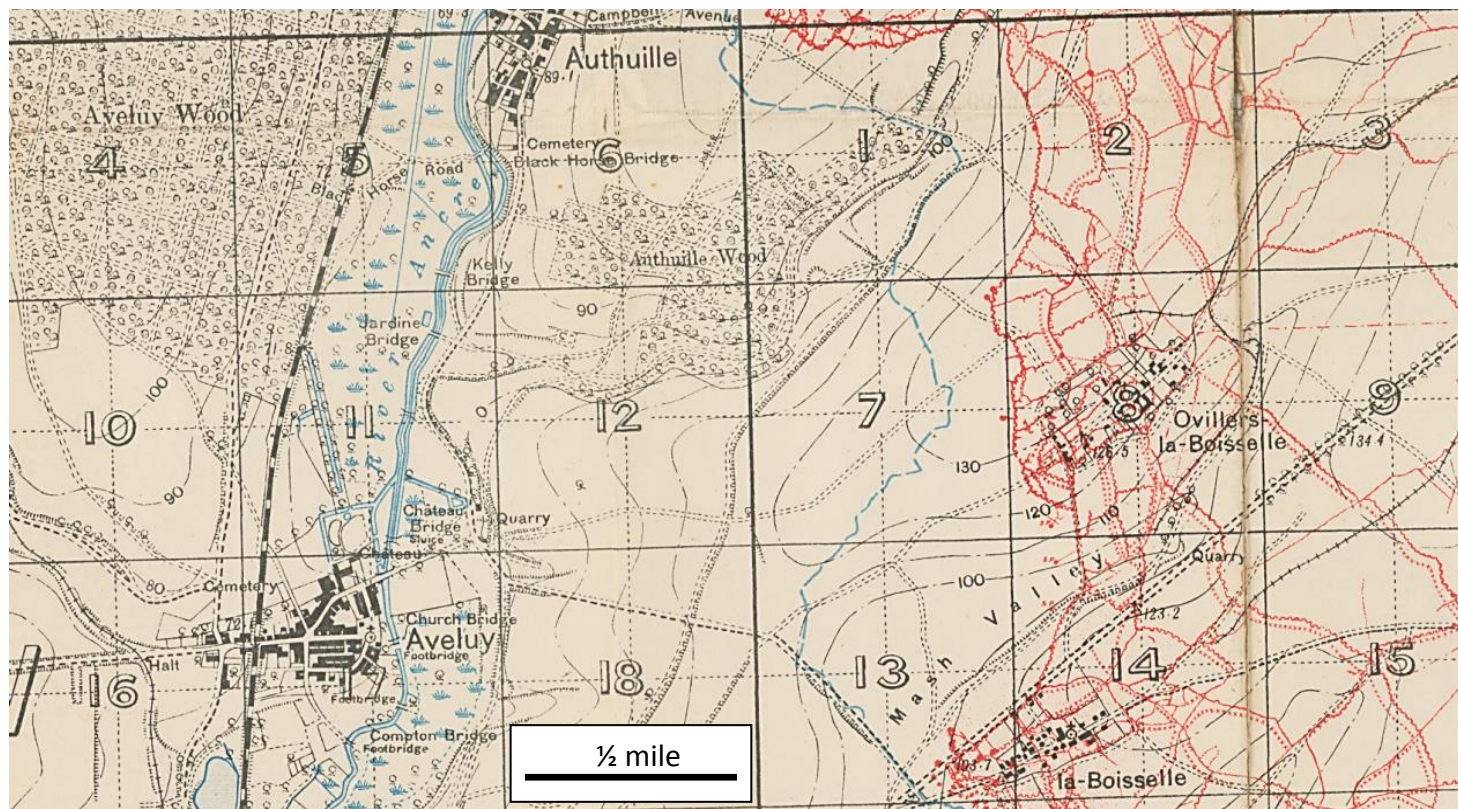
It has also been recorded that:

The first assault on Ovillers was to be at 8.0am by 74 Brigade coming from the south across the head of Mash Valley, and 30 minutes later by 36 Brigade from the west. The 9th Loyal North Lancashires and the 13th Cheshires advanced to the German front line but were halted by machine gun fire. A barrage fell on 36 Brigade (8th and 9th Royal Fusiliers, 7th Royal Sussex) with losses totalling 300. At 8.30am, however, the attack commenced and carried the first three lines of German trenches. The second line was consolidated. During the night the forward lines of the two brigades were linked unopposed by an advance of 8th South Lancashire.

[The Somme: The Day-by-Day Account Chris McCarthy 1993 Arms & Armour, London]



The position of Ovillers (circled, red) where it is believed that Wallace Williams was killed on 7 July 1916. The British front line in July 1916 lay just to the west of the town and, on this map, is shown by the broken black line.



Military map of 18 August 1916 showing the situation between Aveluy and Ovillers-la-Boisselle about five weeks after Wallace Williams had been killed in the unsuccessful attack on Ovillers.

On this map the German trenches and fortifications are shown in red and the North-South British front line is indicated by the broken blue line, east of centre. Allied forces occupied all the territory west of the front but attempts to move eastwards had been repulsed.

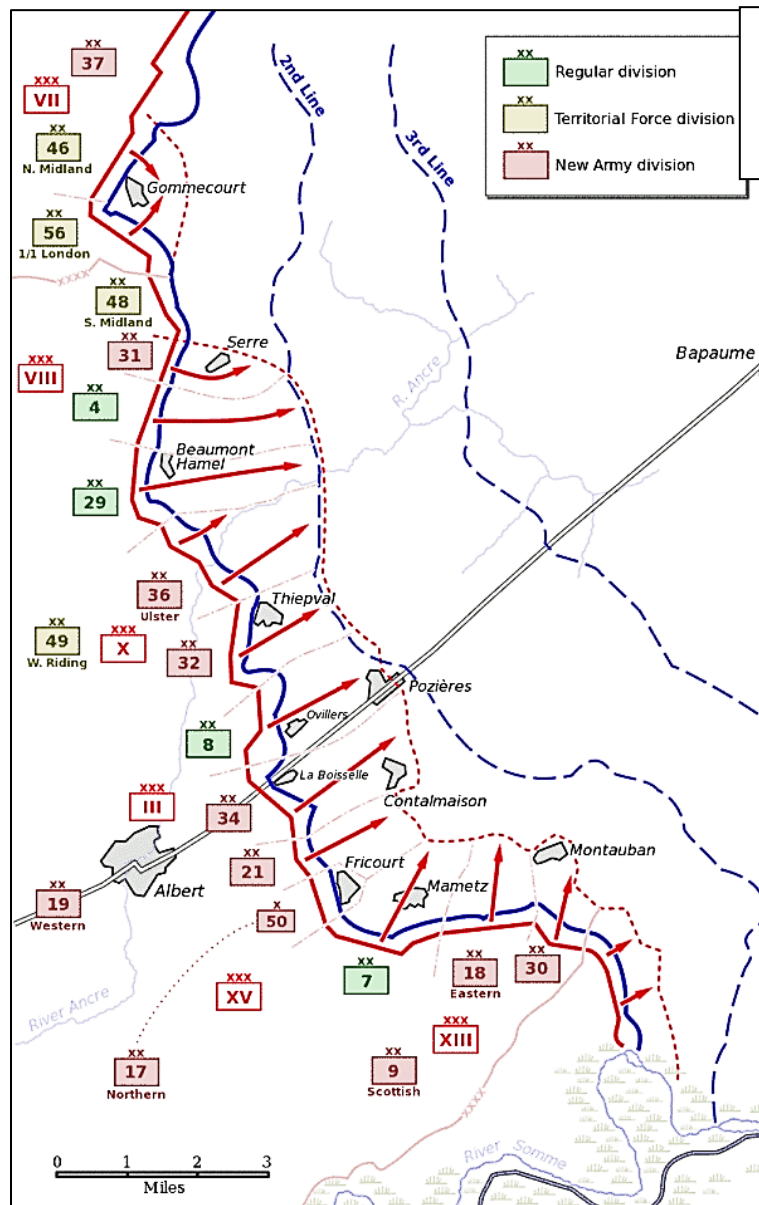
[Source : <http://maps.nls.uk/geo/explore/index.cfm#zoom=15&lat=50.0318&lon=2.6774&layers=101465251&b=1>]

A preparatory bombardment began at 2:12 a.m. on 3 July.....with the addition of the artillery of the 19th Division to the south. Assembly trenches had been dug, which reduced the width of no man's land from 800–500 yards at its widest. Two brigades of the 12th Division attacked at 3:15 a.m., with the left flank covered by a smoke-screen. Red rockets were fired immediately by the Germans and answered by field and heavy artillery barrages on the British assembly, front line and communication trenches, most of which were empty as the British infantry had moved swiftly across no man's land. The four attacking battalions found enough gaps in the German wire to enter the front trench and press on to the support (third) trench but German infantry emerged from dug-outs in the first line, to counter-attack them from behind. At dawn, little could be seen in the dust and smoke, especially on the left, where the smoke-screen blew back. Most of the battalions which reached the German line were overwhelmed when their hand grenades and ammunition ran out, carriers not being able to cross no man's land through the German barrage and machine-gun fire. The attack was reported to be a complete failure by 9:00 a.m. and the last foothold on the edge of Ovillers was lost later on. A company lost direction in the dark, stumbled into La Boisselle and took 220 German prisoners but the 12th division lost 2,400 casualties

On 7 July the British position in the German first line north of Thiepval was attacked and the survivors of the garrison were forced to retreat to the British front line by 6:00 a.m. The 12th Division Brigades and a 25th Division brigade advanced on Ovillers, two battalions of the 74th Brigade on the south side of the Albert–Bapaume road reaching the first German trench, where the number of casualties and continuous German machine-gun fire stopped the advance. On 8 July, German counter-barrage on the lines of the 36th Brigade west of Ovillers caused many casualties; at 8:30 a.m., the British attacked behind a creeping barrage and quickly took the first three German trenches. Many prisoners were taken in the German dug-outs, where they had been surprised by the speed of the British advance. In the early hours of 9 July, the 36th Brigade was reinforced by two battalions and tried to bomb forward but was impeded by deep mud. The attackers struggled forward 200 yards into the village and the 74th Brigade bombed up communication trenches south-west of the village, reaching the church. At 8:00 p.m., the 74th Brigade attacked again and a battalion advanced stealthily to reach the next trench by surprise, then advanced another 600 yards by mistake and found itself under a British barrage, until the artillery-fire was stopped and both trenches consolidated. The German defenders took advantage of the maze of ruins, trenches, dug-outs and shell-holes to keep close British positions so that British artillery-fire passed beyond them. From 9–10 July, three battalions of the 14th Brigade managed to advance a short distance on the left side of the village.

[Adapted from

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_Ovillers]



Anglo-French objectives, north bank of the Somme, 1 July 1916

[https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Capture_of_Ovillers#/media/File:British_plan_Somme_1_July_1916.png]

The attack on Ovillers in July 1916 has been described as an unmitigated disaster and Ovillers was re-captured by the Germans on 25 March 1918, after a retreat by the 47th Division and the 12th (Eastern) Division during Operation Michael, the German Spring Offensive. In World War I, the small commune of Ovillers-la-Boisselle, located some 22 miles (35 km) north-east of Amiens in the Somme department in Hauts-de-France in northern France, was the site of intense and sustained fighting between German and Allied forces. Between 1914 and 1916, the Western Front ran through the commune, and the villages were completely destroyed. After the Armistice of 11 November 1918, the former inhabitants returned and gradually rebuilt most of the infrastructure as it had been before the war.

After the Herbstschlacht ("Autumn Battle", 25 September – 6 November 1915) the German defensive system on the Western Front was improved to make it more capable of withstanding Allied attacks with a relatively small garrison. Digging and wiring of yet

another improved defence line in the area of Ovillers and La Boisselle began in May, French civilians were moved away and stocks of ammunition and hand-grenades were increased in the front-line. Fritz von Below, the commanding officer of the German 2nd Army, proposed a preventive attack in May and a reduced operation from Ovillers to St. Pierre Divion in June but got only one extra artillery regiment. On 6 June, he reported that an imminent Allied offensive at Fricourt and Gommecourt was indicated by air reconnaissance and that the south bank had been reinforced by the French, against whom his XVII Corps was overstretched with twelve regiments to hold 36 kilometres (22 mi) without reserves.

At the start of the Battle of Albert (1–13 July), the name given by the British to the first two weeks of the Battle of the Somme, the ruined villages of Ovillers and La Boisselle found themselves at the very epicentre of events, with the D 929 Albert–Bapaume road marking the main axis of the British attack.

[In 1916] at La Boisselle, the British captured the German front line trench on 2 July, occupied the west end of the ruined village by 9:00 pm and dug in near the church. The next day, the British gradually managed to drive the German units from what was left of La Boisselle, although the German underground fortifications had withstood the recent bombardments and British attempts to signal with flares that La Boisselle had been captured had led to the German artillery bombarding the ruined village with howitzers and mortars, followed by an infantry counter-attack which drove the British back from the east end of La Boisselle. Reinforcements went forward and eventually a line was stabilised through the church ruins, about 100 yards (91m) beyond the start line of the British attack. After dark on 3 July, the 23rd Division began to relieve the 34th Division, which had lost 6,811 men at La

Boisselle from 1–5 July. The 19th Division was rushed forward from reserve, continued the attack at the east side of La Boisselle and captured most of the village ruins by 4 July. The retreating Germans launched three counter-attacks but were defeated, and the capture of La Boisselle was completed by 6 July.

At Ovillers, the 12th Division had resumed the attack on 3 July. A preparatory bombardment began at 2:12 am against the same targets as on 1 July, but with additional support from the 19th Division's artillery near La Boisselle. Attacking at 3:15 am, the British found enough gaps in the German wire to enter the enemy trenches, but German infantry emerged from dug-outs to counter-attack from behind. At dawn, most of the units which had reached the German line were overwhelmed and the last British foothold on the edge of Ovillers was lost shortly thereafter. On 7 July, units of the 12th Division advanced on the ruins of Ovillers but were stopped at the first German trench by continuous machine-gun fire. Before dawn on 9 July, the 12th Division – which had lost 4,721 casualties since 1 July – was relieved by the 32nd Division. From 9–10 July, three battalions of the 32nd Division's 14th Brigade managed to advance a short distance on the left side of Ovillers, and the British continued attacks during the night of 13/14 July. At 2:00 am on 15 July, units of the 25th and the 32nd Divisions attacked Ovillers again, but were repulsed by the German garrison. The next day, the 25th Division attacked at 1:00 am and captured the ruined village, the last Germans surrendering during the evening. After the opening phase of the Battle of the Somme, the ruins of Ovillers and La Boisselle remained a relatively quiet sector of the front until spring 1918.

The ruins of Ovillers and La Boisselle were re-captured by the Germans on 25 March 1918, after a retreat by the 47th Division and the 12th (Eastern) Division during Operation Michael, the German spring offensive. In the afternoon, air reconnaissance saw that the British defence of the line from Montauban and Ervillers was collapsing and the RFC squadrons in the area made a maximum effort to disrupt the German advance. During the Second Battle of Bapaume (21 August – 3 September 1918), the German garrison in the ruins of Ovillers resisted an attack on 24 August but were by-passed on both flanks two days later by the 38th Division and retreated before they could be surrounded. Ovillers and La Boisselle were thus recaptured for the last time.

[Adapted from: <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ovillers-la-Boisselle> in World War I]

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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 June 1919 Wallace's father William received a payment of outstanding wages of 18s 11d from the army and a War Gratuity of £8 10s. This, a total value of £9 8s 11d, is equivalent to a *labour value* (wages) of around £1450 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.

The Register notes Wallace's death as '7-7-16 On or since. Death presumed' indicating that his body was not recovered.

Wallace Williams is commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial which bears the names of 72,194 officers and men of the United Kingdom and South African forces whose remains were never found, or whose graves could not be located. Over 90 percent of those commemorated on the Thiepval Memorial died in the 1916 Battles of the Somme between July and November 1916.

It is uncertain when William Williams and Ellen Williams, Wallace's parents, died.

Eliza Jane Williams may have married Frederick Hill at St Paul's Church, Hooton, in early 1912.

Thomas William Williams appears to have died in July / September 1955 aged 70. He may have married Mary Jane Jones at a Civil Marriage on Wirral in April / June 1920.

Alfred Burnaby Williams married Rhoda Buckley (born 6 March 1894) at Neston Parish Church in late 1928 and he may have died in early 1954 aged 62. In the 1939 Register they are recorded as living at Mealors Cottages on Neston Road; Alfred was recorded as a *permanent way labourer* - he worked on the railway lines. Three lines of the entry have been redacted but it is believed that they had, at this time, children named Margaret Lilian (birth recorded late 1929) ; Arthur Hugh (birth recorded mid-1930 in Eastham) ; Marian Josephine (birth recorded early 1934 in Bebington).

Ernest Wolfram Williams probably died in early 1966 aged 65. Ernest married Doris May Jellicoe (born 3 June 1905) at Neston Parish Church in early 1926 and their son, Harold, was born on 26 June 1926. In the 1939 Register they were living at 20 Rocklee Gardens and Ernest, like his brother Alfred, was recorded as a *permanent way labourer*. It is possible that Ernest and Doris had further children - Brenda in mid-1927 and Charles J in early 1930.