

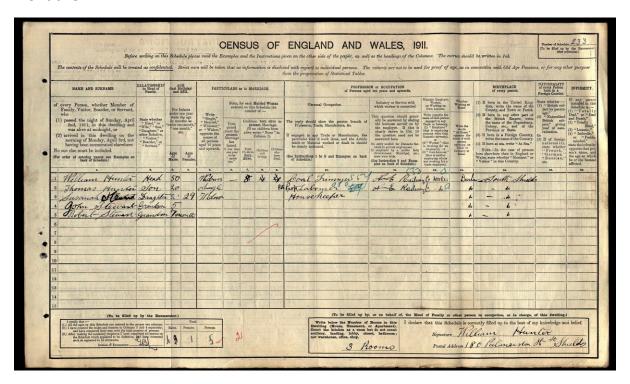


# Private 22/993 Thomas Hunter 22nd Battalion, Durham Light Infantry Died of Wounds – 20th June 1917 Buried in Menin Road South Cemetery, Ypres



I have used published accounts, National Archives records, Battalion War Diaries and my own personal library to piece together the World War 1 service record of Thomas. Sadly, 60% of the soldiers' service records were destroyed by a German bomb during the Blitz in 1940. Thomas's service record was one of those that did survive.

In 1911, Thomas was living in South Shields with his father, sister (who was widowed) and her 2 children. He was working in the coal mine industry, as was his father:



## 22nd Battalion, Durham Light Infantry:

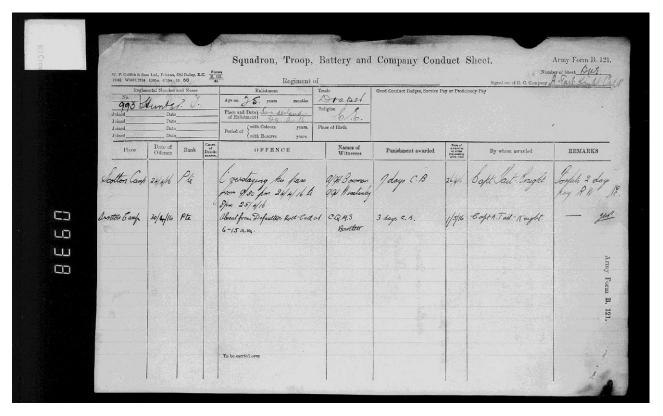
An early solution to the vast demand for labour was to create in each infantry Division a battalion that would be trained and capable of fighting as infantry, but that would normally be engaged on labouring work. They were given the name of Pioneers. They differed from normal infantry in that they would be composed of a mixture of men who were experienced with picks and shovels (i.e. miners, road men, etc) and some who had skilled trades (smiths, carpenters, joiners, bricklayers, masons, tinsmiths, engine drivers and fitters). A Pioneer battalion would also carry a range of technical stores that infantry would not. This type of battalion came into being with an Army Order in December 1914. In early 1916, a number of infantry battalions composed of men who were medically graded unfit for the fighting were formed for labouring work. They had only 2 officers per battalion. Twelve such battalions existed in June 1916.

Thomas joined the DLI in March 1916. He was 25 years old.

Pined from Ar y Reserve, Class By	B141
5029) H S	Army Form B. 25
SHO	ORT SERVICE.
	ne War, with the Colours and in the Army Reserve). 8197
	TESTATION OF Corps 2nd (8) BN DURHAM L. I. (PH
	be put to the Recruit before Enlistment.
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	St Stields
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4. What i C - O O	11 Labourel Months
5. What i	- H no
7. Have y Forces	no No
8. Are you willing to be vaccinated or re-vacci	11/2
9. Are you willing to be enlisted for General S	
10. Did you receive a Notice, and do you und meaning, and who gave it to you?	) ( corps
require your services?	conditions provided His Majesty should so long
For the duration of the War, at the end of speed. You will be required to serve for on speed in the Army Reserve in accordance	which you will be discharged with all convenient no day with the Colours and the remainder of the with the remainder of the Royal Warrant dural
20th Oct., 1915, until such time as you may employed with Hospitals, depots of Mounte	ne day with the Colours and the remainder of the with the provisions of the Royal Warrant dated by he arited up by order of the Army Council. 16.  3d Units, or as a Clerk, etc., you may be retained your services can't he apared, but such retention
after the termination of hostilities until y shall in no case exceed six months.	your services can ba spared, but such retention
I, Thomas Hanleys	do solemnly declare that the above answers made by me
the above questions are true, and that I am v	willing to fulfil the engagements made.  SIGNATURE OF RECRUIT
	Signature of Witness.
OATH TO/BE	TAKEN BY RECRUIT ON ATTESTATION.
1. Thomas Hou	swear by Almighty God, th
that I will, as in duty bound, honestly and and Dignity against all enemies, and will obs Generals and Officers set over me. So help	to His Majesty King George the Fifth, His Heirs, and Successors, a d faithfully defend His Majesty, His Heirs, and Successors, in Person, Crow serve and obey all orders of His Majesty, His Heirs and Successors, and of t me God.
	OF MAGISTRATE OR ATTESTING OFFICER,
would be liable to be punished as provided in	
The above questions were then read to t	the Recruit in my presence. each question, and that his answer to each question has been duly entered
	d signed the declaration and taken the oath before me at
on this // day of	19 / 6 Signature of the Justice
128 1000 129 129 129 129 129 129 129 129 129 129	
I certify that this Attestation of the a	the Certificate of Approving Officer.  Shove-named Recruit is correct, and properly filled up, and that the require
forms appear to have been complied with. If enlisted by special authority. Army	accordingly approve, and appoint him to the ‡ Form B. 203 (or other authority for the enlistment) will be attached to t
original attestation.	W. Thoulen Son
Place West Hartlepool	Compa May (5) Ba Carton L. Charge Approving Office
†The signature of the App	proving Officer is to be affixed in the presence of the Recruit.
If so, the Recruit is to be asked the particulars of	<sup>5</sup> for which the Recruit has been enlisted, his former service, and to produce, if possible, his Certificate of Discharge and Certificate of Ch dorsed in red ink, as follows, via.—(Name) on the (Date).
acter, which amount is returned to him conspicuously en- re-enlisted in the (Regimens)	dorsed in red int, a nonowa, The (rame)
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Examined	ond	lay of July	ary.	191 &	
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0000.) W. 11330/4000 000m. 10/15. C	B. 17	<u>.</u>			
The second secon			Se Company suggestion of		

Whilst on basic training in the UK, he was court marshalled twice and confined to barracks for a total of 10 days:



Thomas arrived on the Western Front on 22nd July 1916 and was transferred to the Royal Engineers, before rejoining the DLI in September 1916:

A VONA	Religion_ Enlisted ( Date of pre	a) 11. Dec 1918 omotion to present	Terms of Service (a	Date of ap	pointment to lan		months.	
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	Date	Report From whom received	Record of promotions, reduc &c., during active service, a B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or in The authority to be quoted in	tions, transfers, casualties, s reported on Army Form n other official documents. each case.	Place of Casualty	Date of Casualty	Remarks Taken from Army Form B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents	
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The Battalion War Diary entry for 23rd September 1916 confirms that "50 Other Ranks attached to 180 TC Royal Engineers returned to duty". TC means tunnelling company. So we now know that Thomas was involved in digging tunnels for underground mines for the period between March and September 1916.

At this stage the DLI were behind the lines at Noyelles in Northern France.

On 15th October 1916, they arrived on the Somme battlefield. This battle had been raging since July, and the autumn rains had turned the battlefield, roads, trenches and dugouts into a muddy quagmire. The BEF needed more support from Pioneers.

On 20th October 1916 the began work on new communication and assembly trenches ready for an attack on a strong German fortified position in Zenith Trench, in front of Le Transloy.

On 23rd October, the attack on Zenith Trench was launched and the DLI followed the attacking troops into the newly won positions and consolidated them. They also dug new communication trenches back to their old front line. During this week, they suffered 120 casualties. 35 men killed, 22 of them on 23rd October.

This photo was taken on the battlefield in October 1916:



They suffered another 100 casualties in the first half of November, including 14 killed by gas shells.

Still on the Somme battlefield, the DLI lost another 15 killed near Maricourt, whilst digging communication trenches to support another attack. A week later, the Germans began their strategic withdrawal to a new defensive line, 30 miles east.

In late May 1917, the Pioneers of the DLI arrived in the Ypres area. A major offensive was being planned for late July. It was to become known as the 3rd Battle of Ypres. It was preceded by the Battle of Messines on 7th June 1917. There was plenty of work for the Pioneers to do.

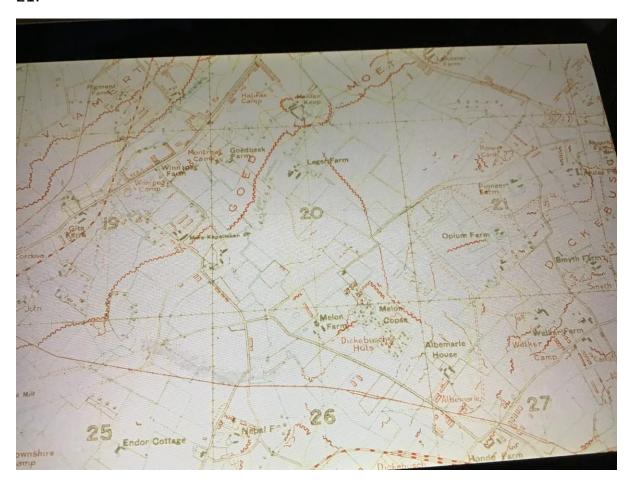
## What happened to Thomas?

The Battalion diary provides us with a detailed account of movements, tasks and location during the few days leading up to Thomas' death.

On 14th June 1917, the Battalion moved to Pioneer Camp near Dickebusch. This photo was taken at the tented camp. The Battalion Diary describes the camp as "one of the best we have been in, consisting of huts and farm buildings."



The location of Pioneer Camp can be seen on this 1917 map in square number 21:



A few days later they were moved into billets in the Esplanade in Ypres. They had been ordered to help construct 2 communication trenches. On 19th June the DLI moved 2 Companies (400 men) from the Esplanade to Swan Chateau. The chateau is no longer there and the area is part of the suburbs of Ypres, called Wit Huis. The lake that you can see in the map is still there though. It's location can be seen on this map.



This link shows a modern map of the same area:

https://www.google.com/maps/@50.8379696,2.8769729,15z

It was close to Swan Chateau that Thomas was mortally wounded. The Battalion Diary for 20th June 1917 reported the following:

"Very little work was done on account of heavy enemy artillery fire. Captain Grindell and 2nd Lt Jarah killed whilst taking A Company up to do their work. Lt R V Hogdson and 6 Other Ranks killed and 23 Other Ranks wounded at their work. The two platoons concerned were on top filling sandbags for making a parapet for new Communication Trench when the enemy suddenly put up a barrage."

Thomas was one of those 23 Other Ranks wounded.

Very close to Swan Chateau is Shrapnel Corner. It was, and still is, a junction that the Germans could see from their positions on the high ground to the East. It was therefore an obvious target for their heavy artillery. This is a 1917 photo of Swan Chateau:



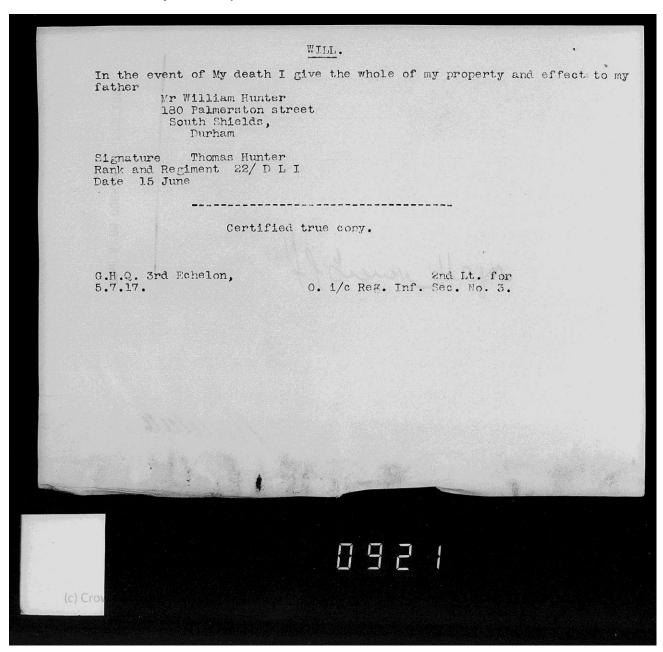
AUSTRALIAN WAR MEMORIAL

I have marked the places where these events took place in June 1917:



It was eventually established that 10 men of the DLI died that day, including Thomas. 9 of them are now buried in Dickebusch New Military Cemetery Extension. He is the only one buried in Menin Road South Cemetery. It is therefore clear that he must have been taken from the trenches to a medical post in Ypres, where he died on the same day he was wounded.

# Thomas made a will just 5 days before he died:



# His few belongings were returned to his father in November 1917:

These are the only articles at present forthcoming, but should any further articles be received at any time they will be duly forwarded.  Yours faithfully,  From	Date 100 16 - 1917
(c) Cr	

## FIELD SERVICE.

Army Form B. 2090a.

REPORT of Death of a Soldier to be forwarded to the War Office with the least possible delay after receipt of notification of death on Army Form B. 213 or Army Form A. 36, or from other official documentary sources.

REGIMENT 2nd Bn Lurham L.T. OR CORPS (Pione or s).  Squadron, Troop, Battery or Company	
Regimental No. 22/993 Rank Pte.	
Surname HUNTER Christian Names N.	
Date 20.6.17. Place In the Field (France).	
Died Cause of Death. Died from Wounds received in Action.	
Nature and Date of Report Mono. 21.6.17.	
By whom made 0Battalion.	
Specially state if killed in action, or died from wounds received in action, or from illness due to field operations or to fatigue, privation military duty, or from injury while on military duty.  (Place	or exposure while on
Burial By whom reported	
State whether he leaves (a) in Pay Book (Army Book 64) Not known  (b) in Small Book (if at Base)  Not known	ot known
All private documents and effects received from the front or hospital, as well as the Pay Book, should be ex will is found it should be at once forwarded to the War Office.	amined, and if any
Any information received as to verbal expressions by a deceased soldier of his wishes as to the disposal of reported to the War Office as soon as possible.	nis estate should be
A duplicate of this Report is to be sent to the Fixed Centre Paymaster at Home, or to the D.F.A.G., Indian E. or Field Disbursing Officer, as the cass may require, together with the Deceased's Pay Book (after withdrawal of latter). If the deceased's Small Book is at the Base, it should be forwarded to the War Object with this Report.	speditionary Force, any will from the
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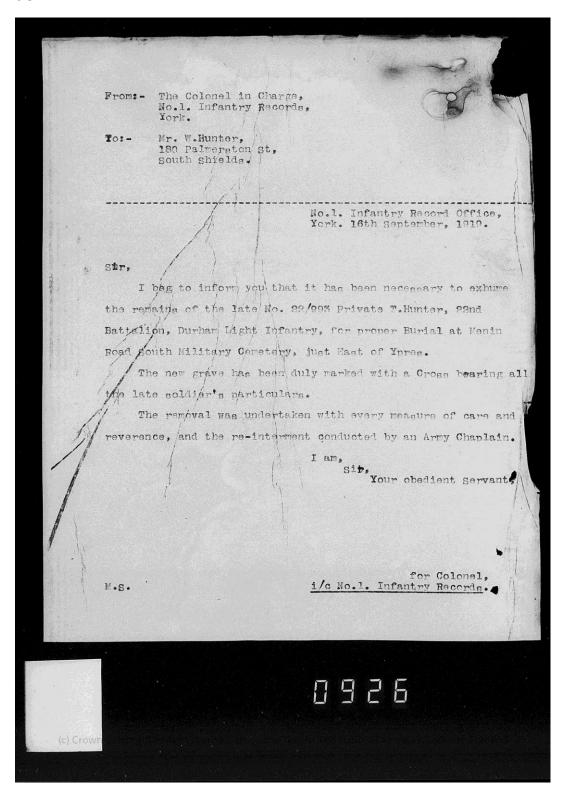
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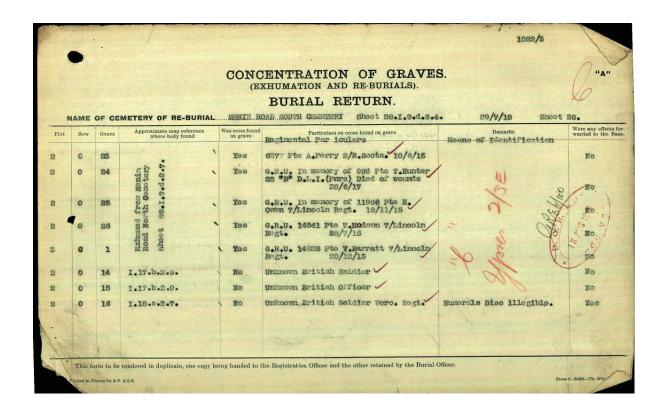
(c) Cros

This form, dated 1919, lists Thomas' relatives that he left behind:

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Mother of the .	Full Blood	Simuel Hunter	Age 35yes			ie I
the Soldier	Half blood					
Sisters of	Full blood	Susan Hunter	39			
the Soldier	Half blood					
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Nephews and Soldier	Nieces of the	George Hund	unter er	Age 91	the Elec.	ard St
	unts by blood of (not Uncles and arriage)	George H	intr	60	K	cia sica
I hereby living in the deg	declare that the grees enquired for.	DECLARA above is a true and complete	Statement	of all the R		
Relationship to Address in full		Fully power Statement and Declaration	neno l	- x St	Signature of t	Shield
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In 1919, Thomas' body was moved across the road from Menin Road North Cemetery to Menin Road South. The Menin Road North Cemetery was closed down.





Other research into Thomas has also been completed by Pauline Priano:

http://www.newmp.org.uk/article.php?categoryid=99&articleid=1386&displayorder=436

**Rest in peace Thomas Hunter** 

**Terry Whenham** 

**April 2020** 

https://www.terrystours.co.uk/