

39: Thomas Arthur Holmes

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

Name as recorded on local memorial or by CWGC: T. Holmes

Rank: Gunner

Battalion / Regiment: 216th Siege Battery, Royal Garrison Artillery

Service Number: 106730 Date of Death: 24 April 1918 Age at Death: 40

Buried / Commemorated at: Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extension, Ribemont-sur-Ancre,
Departement de la Somme, Picardie, France

Additional information given by CWGC: The son of Thomas and Annie Holmes, of Spondon, Derby; husband of Lydia Henrietta Holmes, of 15, Queen St., Watermoor, Cirencester, Glos.

Thomas Arthur Holmes is recorded also on the memorial in St Nicholas Parish Church, Burton. On that memorial, and in the newspaper report of his death, his rank is given as Bombardier.

The database *Soldiers Died in the Great War, 1914-1919* records him as P L BDR – a Paid Lance Bombardier.

The *Liverpool Daily Post* recorded his age as 39, rather than the 40 recorded by CWGC, and noted that he had been the 'late head gardener at Denhall'.

Thomas Holmes attested, for the Royal Garrison Artillery (RGA), in Neston on 4 December 1915 when he was aged 36 years 7 months. He was described as being 5ft 8ins tall, with a 37-inch expanded chest and weighed 136lb (9 stone 10lb / 61.8kg). Whilst his physical development was said to be 'good' it is recorded that he had a mole on the right side of his sternum and that he suffered from external piles! He described himself as the head gardener at Denhall Gardens, Neston and he was married with two children.

Thomas was the (possibly eldest) son of Thomas and Ann E Holmes of 18, Moor End, Spondon, Derby. Thomas snr was a railway goods guard (with the Midland Railway in 1911) and both he and Ann were born in Spondon; in 1911 they had been married for 33 years and four of their six children had survived:

Thomas Arthur	birth registered at Shardlow 2 nd quarter 1879
Edith Anne	birth registered at Shardlow 1 st quarter 1881
Albert	birth registered at Shardlow 4 th quarter 1882
Sarah May	birth registered at Shardlow 2 nd quarter 1897

By the time of the 1901 census the family had moved from Chapel Lane, Spondon, to 18, Moor End, Spondon but Thomas Arthur Holmes had now left home and was boarding with stationary engine stoker Walter and Polly Tarling at 13 Wharf Road, Altrincham. Thomas was then 21, single, and described as an orchid grower.

On 7 October 1908 Thomas Arthur Holmes married Lydia Henrietta Edwards at Cirencester Parish Church; Lydia was the daughter of watchmaker and repairer Edwin and Charlotte Edwards of 16, Queen Street, Watermoor, Cirencester. Thomas's first

The usual armaments were 6-inch, 8-inch and 9.2-inch howitzers, although some had huge railway- or road-mounted 12-inch howitzers. As British artillery tactics developed, the Siege Batteries were most often employed in destroying or neutralising the enemy artillery, as well as putting destructive fire down on strongpoints, dumps, store, roads and railways behind enemy lines. The 216th Siege Battery consisted of four 6-inch howitzers, which together with their crews formed a small part of 89 Heavy Artillery Group (HAG), originally attached to the 46th North Midland Division. The 46th Division had fought through some of the toughest campaigns of the Great War, taking a leading part in the opening of The Battle of the Somme in July 1916, suffering heavy casualties during an attack on Gommecourt, and fought through the later Battle of the Ancre, and following the German Retreat to the Hindenburg Line in 1917. [Adapted from: <http://www.1914-1918.net/siege-battery> and <http://www.mikerlewis.com/diary/>]

Having attested in December 1915 Thomas wasn't mobilised and posted, as a Gunner, until 24 July 1916 when he joined the 2nd RGA Depot which, it seems, was based at Gosport and was in charge of the Southern Coastal Defences defending Portsmouth and Portland. On 21 December 1916 the 216th Siege Battery RGA embarked at Southampton for France as part of the British Expeditionary Force (BEF), landing at Le Havre the same day.

What happened next is unknown but it appears that Thomas became ill as, on 24 December, he was admitted to a Field Hospital which necessitated him being transferred to No.7 Canadian Stationary Hospital, Harfleur, just inland of Le Havre. There is some suggestion that his condition was diagnosed as PUO - 'pyrexia of unknown origin', very probably a feverish condition associated with trench fever. Thomas may have remained here until 18 January 1917 when he appears to have rejoined his unit.

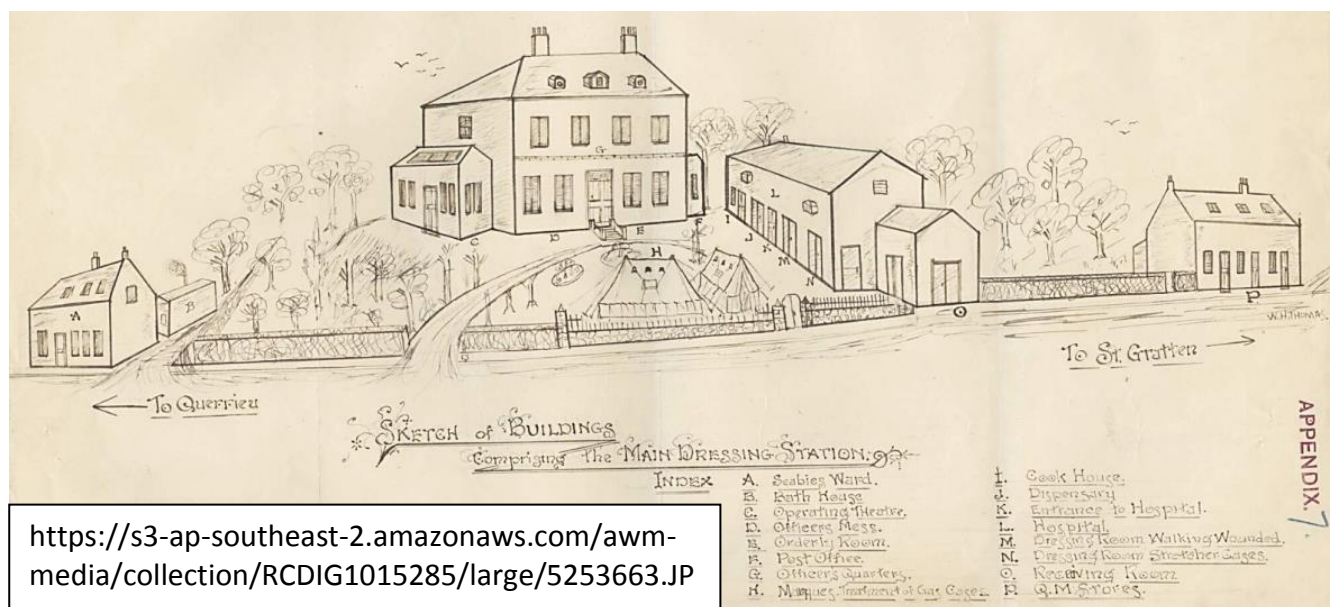
By 14 July 1917 the 46th Division, which included the 216th Siege Battery RGA, was in the Loos Sector, and they played an important role in supporting the infantry during The Battle for Hill 70 which began the following day. The 46th North Midland Division was in the thick of the fighting, with the Canadian Corps to its south, and the 216th Siege Battery was fully involved in support of the assaulting troops. On 6 September 1917 Thomas was appointed a Lance Bombardier and this was confirmed on 24 September.

The details of the action in which Thomas Holmes was involved when he was wounded, and died on 24 April 1918, are not known to be recorded - 37 members of the RGA died on that day, although only three were from the 216th Siege Battery. It is known that, after being wounded, Thomas was taken to the 11th Australian Field Ambulance where he died; he had served in the army for a total of 2 years 142 days, 1 year and 124 days being with the BEF.

The 11th Field Ambulance was the Field Ambulance Company that nominally supported the 11th Brigade of the Third Division, comprised of the 41st (Queensland) 42nd (Queensland), 43rd (South Australia) and 44th (Western Australia) Battalions.

Field Ambulances were however under command of the Division HQ rather than the supported Brigade.

The 11th Australian Field Ambulance had been located at Querrieu on The Somme, around 11½km north-east of Amiens but, shortly after 12 April 1918, they were forced to move as a consequence of the increase in hostile shelling of the vicinity ¹. In fact the unit moved only a small distance and to better accommodation; the site, just 1½km north of Querrieu (on the Querrieu - St-Gratien road) was a large chateau with numerous outbuildings:



<https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/RCDIG1015285/large/5253663.JPG>

Table showing Admissions, Evacuations, etc. of Sick and Wounded
from 28th March to

Date	Admissions		To C.C.S.		To Duty		Deaths		Remarks
1918	Sick	Wounded	Sick	Wounded	Sick	Wounded	Sick	Wounded	
Mar. 28	36	334	34	319	2	12	-	3	
29	25	79	1	15	-	1	-	1	
30	40	226	25	173	4	29	-	5	
31	25	23	12	17	15	6	-	5	
Apr. 1	31	22	24	13	5	12	-	2	
2	27	15	20	16	2	1	-	-	
3	27	2	25	2	12	4	-	-	
4	44	110	27	102	5	2	-	3	
5	31	160	28	153	12	4	-	4	
6	35	40	26	23	6	11	-	-	
7	48	16	38	15	4	1	-	1	
8	32	11	25	8	1	5	-	-	
9	56	30	41	71	6	6	-	-	
10	74	37	56	31	9	5	-	1	
11	57	21	63	20	16	3	-	1	
12	60	24	52	19	13	2	-	2	
13	35	14	25	11	3	4	-	-	
14	43	31	28	30	2	-	-	1	
15	23	12	32	4	3	-	-	-	
16	42	24	37	34	7	-	-	-	Augmented Cases to C.C.S.
17	49	17	-	27	3	2	-	1	
18	46	14	-	40	14	7	-	-	
19	41	24	2	36	34	17	1	-	
20	44	50	12	38	46	5	-	-	
21	44	32	3	39	43	5	-	1	
22	42	9	10	25	10	7	1	2	
23	49	48	144	37	53	7	-	4	
24	12	209	34	88	342	11	1	5	
25	39	29	23	29	41	12	5	8	
26	47	16	9	30	39	15	-	-	
27	58	7	9	34	18	1	-	2	
28	57	14	-	36	19	21	3	-	
29	25	4	-	25	34	16	-	-	
30	73	6	6	49	11	21	1	-	
TOTALS	1517	1722	252	1112	1593	284	135	47	

[Source: <https://s3-ap-southeast-2.amazonaws.com/awm-media/collection/RCDIG1015285/large/5253669.JPG>]

The records show that, for the period from 28 March - 30 April 1918 the unit received 1783 wounded men, the largest number (209, 11.7%) being on 24 April, the day on which Thomas Holmes died. Indeed, on that day 5 wounded men died at the hospital.

The hospital's War Diary for this time gives some further useful information:

¹ Another factor was that the Querrieu site was poorly located in the chain of evacuation for injured troops – there was no Casualty Clearing Station within 30km.

11th Australian Field
Ambulance War Diary
(extract)
<https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/C1353863>

24th Early this morning heavy artillery fire commenced at 4 a.m. Enemy shells of large calibre fell regularly for about two hours in the open country North East of us. Casualties began to arrive at 6 a.m. and continued freely throughout the day and night. A large percentage of cases was the result of enemy shell gas. This appears to consist largely of mixed Mustard and Phosgene gases. We are unable to obtain information from the patients themselves as to the variety of gas, very few of them being able to offer any opinion at all. A tent has been erected in the grounds in which the cloths of gas patients are changed and pyjamas substituted. The orderlies working there are provided with gowns and a solution of chloride of lime with which frequently to rinse their hands. These orderlies also suffer a certain discomfort from contact with the cloths, such as sore eyes and sneezing, but no more serious effects. Cloths salvaged were put through the Foden Lorry to clear them of gas contamination - Some of the articles being sent to battalions requiring supplies and the rest to Divisional Salvage Dump at BONT NOYELLES. Cases necessitating immediate attention were operated on in the theatre, and a large percentage were redressed or otherwise made comfortable for their longer journey to the C.C.S.

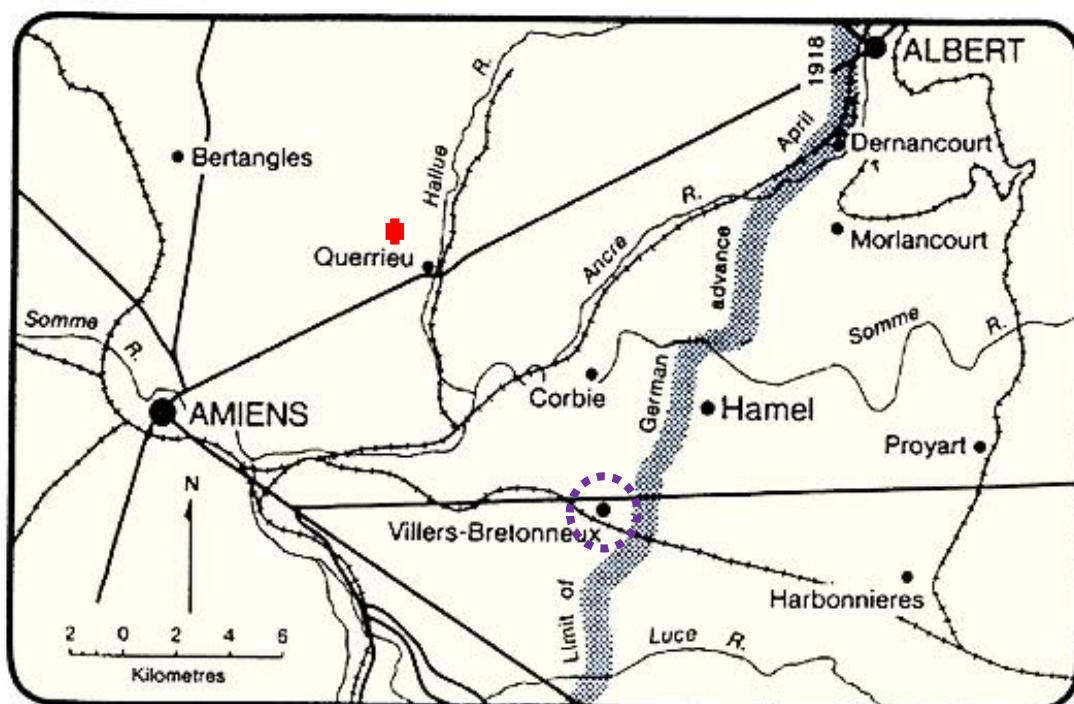
Our routes of evacuation for the day were, namely.

No. 30	C.C.S.	VIGNACOURT.
61	"	"
12	"	LONGPRE
4	"	PERNOIS.

We have established a WALKING WOUNDED POST on the MAIN AMIENS ROAD (Map reference Sheet 62 D H 16 d 50.30). Should a large influx of wounded occur, this post will relieve the W.D.S. of all slightly wounded men and allow only stretcher-cases to be dealt with. Evacuations will be made to the C.C.S.'s., as from the W.D.S.

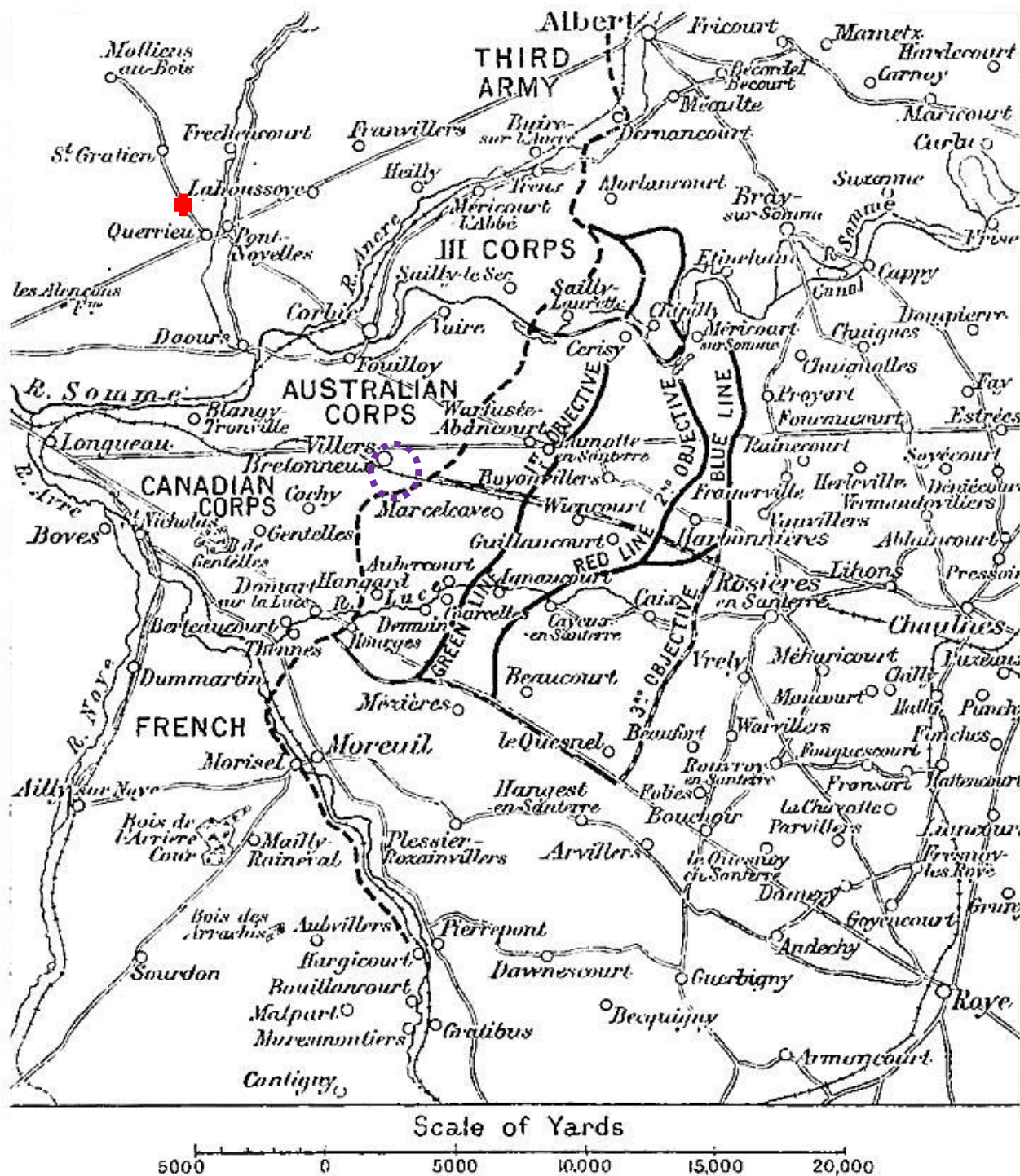
The War Diary records, for 24 April, that *a large percentage of cases was the result of enemy shell gas. This appears to consist largely of mixed Mustard and Phosgene gasses.* The War Diary entry for 26/29 April, referring back to the influx of men on 24 April, comments that *Most of these were from VILLERS BRETONNEUX and a forest which adjoins the village. Apparently the gas is hanging about here and men are being*

exposed to a low concentration of gas over a prolonged period. It is quite probable that Thomas Arthur Holmes was in the area of Villers Bretonneux when he was injured. If this is correct, then he was a casualty of The Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux (24 to 25 April 1918), during the German Spring Offensive against the Allied lines to the east of Amiens.



The location of the 11th Australian Field Ambulance in April 1918 (red) and Villers-Bretonneux (encircled in purple). The map shows also the western limits of the German troop advances in April 1918 although considerable shelling occurred west of this line – Querrieu was in range of the German artillery.

[<https://teganbrunton.weebly.com/battle-of-le-hamel.html>]



Although representing the military situation of 6 August 1918 at The Battle of Amiens, some 3½ months after Thomas Arthur Holmes died, the map shows the relative positions of the 11th Australian Field Ambulance in April 1918 (red), Villers-Bretonneux (encircled in purple) and the other settlements of this area of the Somme and further south.

<http://www.allworldwars.com/Tanks-in-the-Great-War-1914-1918-by-John-Fuller.html>

The Second Battle of Villers-Bretonneux was notable for the first major use of tanks by the Germans, who

deployed fourteen of their twenty A7Vs and for the first tank-versus-tank battle in history. The tank battle occurred when three advancing A7Vs met and engaged three British Mark IV tanks, two of which were female tanks armed only with machine-guns. The two Mark IV females were damaged and forced to withdraw but the male tank, armed with 6-pounder guns, hit and disabled the lead A7V, which was then abandoned by its crew. The Mark IV continued to fire on the two remaining German A7Vs, which withdrew. The "male" then advanced with the support

A black and white photograph showing a crowded interior of a military transport vehicle, likely a train car. Soldiers are seated and standing, some wearing helmets and uniforms. The space is narrow and filled with people, suggesting a busy transport scene.

[<https://rslvirtualwarmemorial.org.au/explore/units/189>]

The Casualty Form of Thomas Arthur Holmes's Service Record notes, faintly on the final line (arrowed) his death from wounds. Immediately above this entry there is an indication that, in early February 1918, he had a short leave to the UK.

Although he was buried soon after his death, Thomas's body was later exhumed and reburied in the Ribemont Communal Cemetery Extension, south-west of Albert on The Somme.

Army Form B. 103.

Casualty Form—Active Service.

Regiment or Corps ROYAL REGIMENT OF ARTILLERY (RGA). Regimental Number 1067

Rank Pt. Surname HARRIS Christian Name JAMES HARRIS

Religion R.C. Age on Enlistment 26 years 1 months.

Enlisted (a) 4-12-15 Terms of Service (a) 8 y 1 m Service reckons from (a) 4-12-15

Date of promotion to present rank _____ Date of appointment to lance rank _____

Extended () Re-engaged () Qualification (b) _____

_____ Of Corps Trade and Rate _____

Signature of Officer i/c Records.

Date	Report From whom received	Record of promotions, reductions, transfers, casualties, etc., during active service, as reported on Army Form B. 223, Army Form A. 36 or in other official documents. The authority to be quoted in each case.	Place of Casualty	Date of Casualty	Remarks B. 213, Army Form A. 36, or other official documents
22-12-16	OB 216 SB	Embarked ... Disembarked...	S ^t /Hampton Havre	21-12-16 22-12-16	Nominal Roll
6-1-17	OB 216 SB	Admitted to Hospital	Field	24-12-16	B213
13-1-17	Base List	To Havfleur. Havre	-	9-1-17	Base 213
15-2-17	Base Depot	To Unit	-	18-1-17	Memo. 18-1-17
22-9-17	OB 216 SB	Appointed Bar Room	-	25-9-17	B213
1-1-18	OB 216 SB	(S ^t /G ^d Lt Col) G.S.B.	S 1443/1917	-	-
1-2-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-2-18	B213
1-3-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-3-18	B213
1-4-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-4-18	B213
1-5-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-5-18	B213
1-6-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-6-18	B213
1-7-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-7-18	B213
1-8-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-8-18	B213
1-9-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-9-18	B213
1-10-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-10-18	B213
1-11-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-11-18	B213
1-12-18	OB 216 SB	Leave 10 days leave	-	2-12-18	B213

(c) In the case of a man who has re-engaged for, or enlisted into Section D, Army Reserve, particulars of such re-engagement or enlistment will be entered.
(d) Signaller, Shoelands, &c.
(E) W 12015-1156 J.P. & Co., Ltd. Forms/B103/2

[P.T.O.]

HOLMES—April 24, killed in action, aged 39 years, Bombrdr. **THOMAS ARTHUR HOLMES, B.G.A.**, late head cardener at Denball, Noston.

Liverpool Daily Post - Monday 20 May 1918

British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920 It is not clear why this card records Thomas's unit as RGA/248^B

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Begtl. No.
HOLMES Thomas A.	R.G.A.	Cm	106730
Theatre of War first served in			
Date of entry therein			

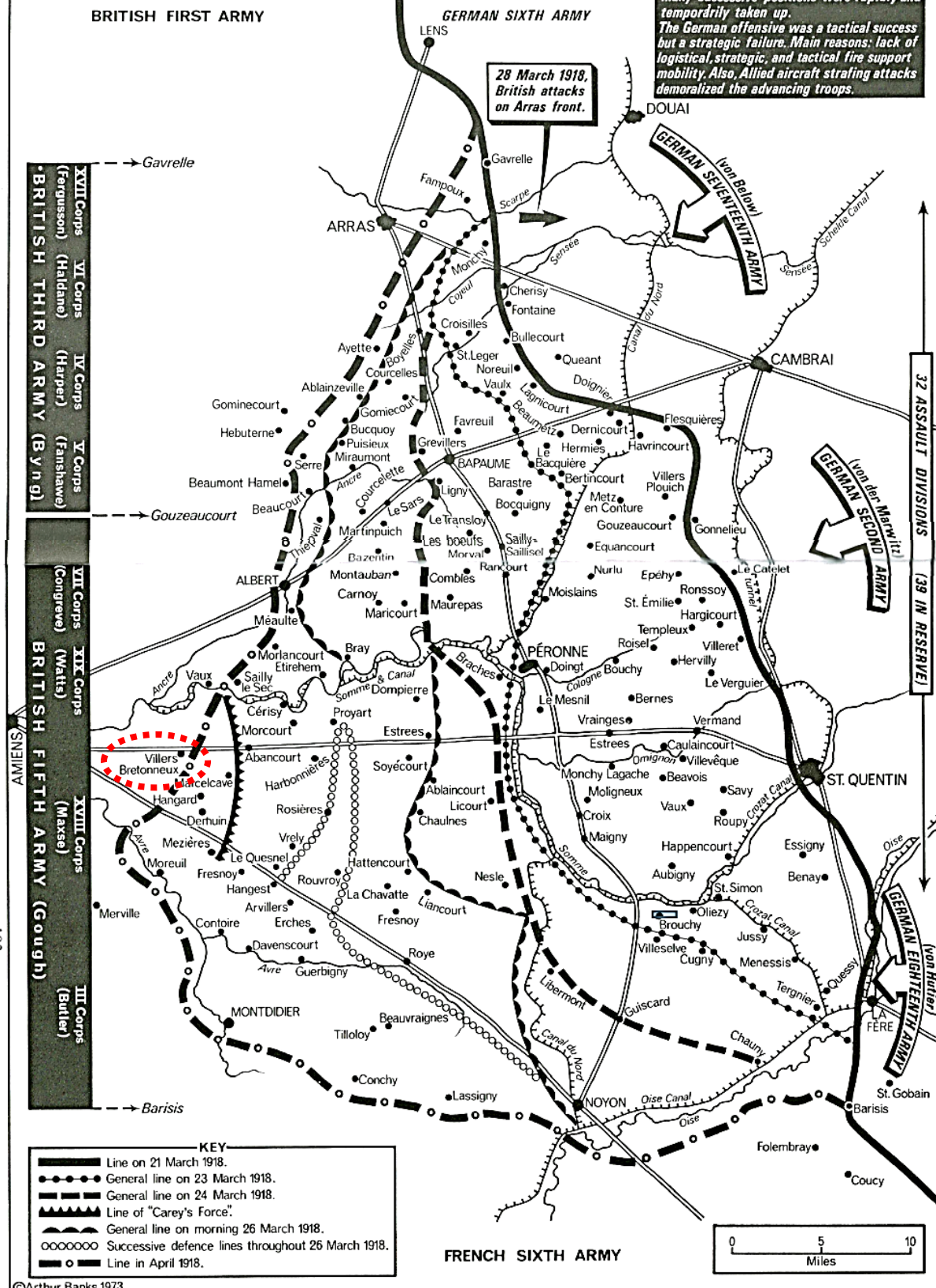
THE GERMAN ADVANCE AND THE BRITISH RETREAT MARCH - APRIL 1918

Important note: on 3 April, the Allied armies were unified under one supreme "generalissimo" (Foch).

RIVAL STRENGTHS

ARMIES	DIVISIONS	GUNS
German 17th Army	25	2,234
German 2nd Army	21	1,751
German 18th Army	25	2,623
British 3rd Army	14	1,120
British 5th Army	12	1,566

This map depicts the German advance and the British retreat between 21 March and 28 March 1918, together with the line re-established on 4 and 5 April 1918. On 22 March, the first breakthrough south of the River Somme occurred, and by 26 March, the lines of the British Fifth Army (south of the Somme) were near to total disintegration. Between 26 and 27 March, many successive positions were rapidly and temporarily taken up. The German offensive was a tactical success but a strategic failure. Main reasons: lack of logistical, strategic, and tactical fire support mobility. Also, Allied aircraft strafing attacks demoralized the advancing troops.



Villers-Bretonneux, the probable location where Thomas Arthur Holmes was injured, is encircled in red.

[Source: A Military Atlas of the First World War Arthur Banks Lea Cooper (an imprint of Pen & Sword Books) 2001]

Following the death of Thomas his widow, Lydia, and family moved - perhaps temporarily - back to her parents' house in Cirencester (N^o. 16 Queen Street and not N^o. 15 as recorded by the CWGC). She was paid, from 11 November 1918 a weekly pension of 25s 5d.

It appears that Lydia and Thomas had had a second son, Thomas Edwin Holmes, who was born on 25 February 1913. Thomas may have died in late 1956, aged 43, in Cirencester, but nothing definite is known of his brother, Arthur.

Army Form W.5080 records the details of Thomas's closest relatives. Although Lydia, Thomas's widow, gave her address as 16, Queen Street, Watermoor, Cirencester, Gloucestershire, the form was dated (26 May 1919) by Patrick F.A. Morrell at Denhall. Morrell was the vicar of Burton Parish Church from 1902 to 1923.

343

Army Form W. 5080

To be filled in by
the person in Charge of
the deceased's estate

Regiment 216 S. Bty. P. 90
106 730 Bn. Thomas Arthur Holmes

STATEMENT of the Names and Addresses of all the Relatives of the above-named deceased Soldier in each of the degrees specified below that are now living.

NOTE.—Against those degrees of relationship in which there is no relative now living the word "None" is to be inserted. If the answers are not filled in, much correspondence and delay may be occasioned by the post.

Degree of relationship	NAME IN FULL of every relative now living in each degree required, for (see note above)	ADDRESS IN FULL of each surviving relative opposite his or her name.
Widow of the Soldier ...	<u>Lydia H. Holmes.</u>	<u>16. Queen St. Watermoor Cirencester. Glos</u>
Children of the Soldier and dates of their births...	<u>Arthur Charles 27 August 1910</u> <u>Thomas Edwin 25 Feb. 1913</u>	<u>16. Queen St. Watermoor Cirencester. Glos</u>
Father of the Soldier ...	<u>Thomas Holmes.</u>	<u>18. Moor End, Spendon, Leics.</u>
Mother of the Soldier ...	<u>Annie Holmes.</u>	<u>18. Moor End, Spendon, Leics.</u>
Brothers of the Soldier	Full Blood ...	<u>None</u>
	Half blood ...	<u>None</u>
Sisters of the Soldier	Full blood ...	<u>Edith Hutton. 12. Moor End, Spendon, Leics.</u> <u>May Holmes. 18. Moor End, Spendon, Leics.</u>
	Half blood ...	

If no Relatives in the degrees above are now living the following particulars should be given:—

	Names of those now living.	Addresses in full.
Grandparents of the Soldier ...		
Nephews and Nieces of the Soldier ...		
Uncles and Aunts by blood of the Soldier (not Uncles and Aunts by marriage) ...		

DECLARATION.

I hereby declare that the above is a true and complete Statement of all the Relatives of the late Soldier now living in the degrees required for ...

Mrs. Lydia H. Holmes Signature of the Declarant.

Relationship to the Soldier widow

Address in full 16. Queen St. Watermoor, Cirencester, Glos.

I hereby certify that the above Statement and Declaration made by ... and signed in my presence is complete and correct, to the best of my knowledge and belief.

Dated at Denhall this 26th day of May 1919.

Signature of Minister or Magistrate Patrick F.A. Morrell Qualification Curate in Holy Orders, Vicar of Burton Vicarage, Burton, Leics.

Address Norton, Cheshire

17. W. 13833 (P. 111) 1,000,000/5. 216. S.O.F.B.

Record No.	Registry No.	Soldier's Name	Regiment, Rank, No.	Date and Place of Death	CREDITS			CHARGES			Date of Authority	To whom Authorized	Amount Authorized			No. of List in which advertised
					Account and Date	£	s.	d.	£	s.	d.	Account and Date	£	s.	d.	
671446	621318	Holmes, Thomas	216 S. Bty. P. 90	24. 4. 18. France.		19	12	10	11	8	4	11. 8. 18	11	8	4	
		Arthur	R. G. A. 11	Quil. 6-18.		11	15	6								
			9th Bn. Field Amb.	7-18.												
			106 730. France.													
			Belgium													
						8	-	-								

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 representatives. At the same time a War Gratuity was often paid. Thomas Arthur Holmes had accrued a credit of £11 8s 4d and this was received by his widow Lydia, as sole legatee. Lydia received also the £8 War Gratuity. The total payment, £19 8s 4d, is approximately equivalent to a *labour value* (ie wages) of about £2950 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.

