

PRIVATE THOMAS JOHN EVANS

267009, 2nd/6th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment

Died aged 29 on 10 May 1917

Buried with honour at *Chapelle British Cemetery, Holnon, France*; III B 7

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Chapelle British Cemetery, Holnon



Gloucestershire Regiment

THOMAS JOHN EVANS was born in 1888, the son of John Evans, Basket Maker of High Street, and his wife Ann (formerly Hunt) who was a Laundress; they married in 1879. There were two families of the same name in Tewkesbury in 1901 but only one with school-age children. In 1911 Thomas was assisting his father and living with two brothers in Bishops Alley. His father died in 1915. Little is known of Thomas's early years, except that he was a member of a 'Drum and Fife' band.

Thomas was not included in the Abbey's list of volunteers – a fact perhaps confirmed by his being allocated eventually to the second-line Territorial Battalion, the 2nd/6th Gloucesters. Second-line units were originally restricted to home defence only but, by reason of the Military Services Act of 1916, they became eligible in that year for overseas service.

In January 1915 the battalion came under the command of the 2nd Gloucester & Worcester Brigade, 2nd South Midland Division; in August 1915 this formation became the 183rd Infantry Brigade, 61st (2nd South Midland) Division. The battalion landed in France on 24 May 1916 and was involved soon afterwards on 19 July in the *Battle of Fromelles*. This was intended to divert German resources from the main battle on the Somme, but the attack was a disaster.

In early March 1917, however, the 61st was one of the Divisions employed in the cautious pursuit of the enemy in their retreat to the Hindenburg Line, when the Germans carried out

a deep withdrawal from the area of the Somme to a series of formidable pre-prepared defensive positions. At the beginning of May the Division held the line just west of St. Quentin, which was still in German hands. According to the War Diary, the battalion was in reserve in the Holnon Wood sector at the start of the day on 10 May 1917 until it moved into the front line in the evening to relieve the 2nd/7th Worcesters.

Private Thomas John Evans was killed on 10 May 1917, but the Battalion War Diary makes no reference to casualties on that date. Around that time the battalion seems to have been primarily involved in providing working parties to improve the trench wiring. In the previous few days there is reference in the Diary to *'The ordinary amount of shelling'* and *'Intermittent artillery fire'*, from which it can only be assumed that Thomas was a victim of trench warfare, hit perhaps by random artillery fire or by a sniper. He is buried in *Chapelle British Cemetery*, Holnon, near St Quentin.

Thomas had a younger brother, **William Evans**, born in 1893, who was commemorated as a volunteer. He was allocated to the 1st Gloucesters; he was a Reservist who had re-joined the Colours, arriving in France on 19 September 1914, and was wounded *'in the head'* in April 1915. He was awarded the *1914 (Mons) Star* and survived the war. In 1939-1940 William was living in Eagles Alley and he died aged 60 in 1953. Sadly for an *Old Contemptible*, he is buried in a *'common grave'*.