

A SOLDIER
OF THE GREAT WAR



**Private Thomas William
LITHGOW**

Service Number: 27-1074

27th Battalion Tyneside Irish

Northumberland Fusiliers

Died 1st July 1916 aged 25

Commemorated on Thiepval Memorial

Pier and face 10B, 11B and 12B

WW1 Centenary record of an

Unknown Soldier

KNOWN UNTO GOD



Recruitment - Tyneside Irish 24th, 25th, 26th and 27th Service Battalions of the Northumberland Fusiliers. **Private Thomas LITHGOW** was a member of the **27th Tyneside Irish Service Battalion**. This was a 'Pals' regiment of the Northumberland Fusiliers, raised in the North East at the end of 1914. Enrolment was slow and a meeting was arranged for the 31st of October to shame those who had not enrolled. Over 100 men enrolled at the meeting and by November 2nd the Battalion was over 900. On the 4th of November the Battalion was full (1,737).

By the 10th of November a second battalion (1,547) was officially sanctioned and within two days, the battalion was almost full. The War Office sanctioned a third battalion (1,487) and then a fourth battalion (1,560) creating a Tyneside Irish Brigade. In 96 days the Tyneside Irish had managed to recruit 5,331 soldiers.

Battle of the Somme

The plan was for the British forces to attack on a fourteen-mile front after an intense week-long artillery bombardment of the German positions. Over 1.6 million shells were fired, 70 for every one metre of front, the idea being to decimate the German Front Line. The British shells increased just prior to zero-hour and merged with 19 mine explosions. The troops went over the top at 7.30am and advanced in lines at a slow, steady pace across the expanse of No Man's Land.

Objective 9 – La Boisselle – The Somme See Fig. 1 Attack on La Boisselle

Private Thomas LITHGOW and the Tyneside Irish were assigned Objective 9, an attack on the village of La Boisselle. The village of La Boisselle was of huge strategic importance as it would open up the road to Bapaume. This would allow the Allies to attack Poziers, the next town further up the road then from there, Thiepval.

The Germans held the best positions overlooking the two valleys – one to the left-hand side of Lochnagar Crater- this was nicknamed 'Sausage Valley' by the British as it usually had an airship above it on reconnaissance. The other valley, on the other side of the road, was nicknamed 'Mash Valley'. This was the largest piece of No Man's Land on the whole Somme battlefield (700m wide) Rather than try a head-on attack at the village of La Boisselle the Allies decide to attack either side. As part of this offensive they set off two huge mines, one near the road at the side of the village (18,000kgs) and one at Lochnagar, the biggest set off that day 28,000kgs. The shelling stopped and the mines were blown at 7.28am. At 7.30am the soldiers went over the top.

The weight of machine gun fire from Sausage Redoubt and from their left, in the direction of La Boisselle meant the 15th and 16th Royal Scots bunched together and veered towards the right ending, up at Birch Tree and Shelter Woods. The 16th Battalion re-grouped with the part of 27th Tyneside Irish and the 11th Suffolks and successfully captured Scots Redoubt. The result of veering to the right however, meant they did not manage to attack Sausage Redoubt, which dominated the surrounding area for the rest of the day.

The remaining 27th Irish merged with the 24th Irish and pushed forward past Scots Redoubt towards the outskirts of Contalmaison. This would be the greatest distance covered by any battalions on the day, over 2½ miles from where they started.

Outcome of the battle Very little gain on the day – The Lincolns captured ground up to the crater and the Royal Scots, Suffolks and 27th Tyneside Irish managed to take Scots Redoubt, in almost undamaged condition. This was one of the few successes on the day. The casualties on the day for the 27th Tyneside Irish totalled 539 including 159 killed.

Casualties for La Boisselle: The highest casualty rate of the day with over 6,380 officers and men either killed or wounded. Of these 2,267 were dead. **Thomas LITHGOW** was one of these soldiers. Eighty-five per cent of the soldiers who died on this battlefield, 1,927, are unknown soldiers.

Thomas LITHGOW, aged 25, died at La Boisselle and has no known grave.

Commemorated at: **Thiepval Memorial – Pier and face 10B, 11B and 12B**

Additional information: **Son of Arthur and Mary Lithgow of 4 Thompson's Yard, Market Place, Bishop Auckland. Co. Durham.** The record of **Private Thomas LITHGOW** has been compiled as part of the World War 1 Centenary and **Thomas LITHGOW** who is an unknown soldier, is now known by **Jake Fitzpatrick, St Thomas More RC Academy, Oct. 2017.**

References: The historical information used in this document has been abridged from the following sources:

Tyneside Irish – John Sheen

One Day On The Somme – 1st July 1916 – Barry Cuttell

La Boisselle - Somme – Michael Stedman

Map La Boisselle – Dr J.P. Normington