

**Pte. Thomas George Coombs**  
6<sup>th</sup> South Wales Borderers

## Pte. Thomas George Coombs 6<sup>th</sup> South Wales Borderers

*Commemorated on Newbridge War Memorial as T. Coombes SWB  
Commemorated on Celynyn Collieries Roll of Honour*

### **Family**

Thomas George Coombs was born in Crumlin, Mon. in 1896 to Thomas and Susan Ellen (nee Bradford) Coombs.

The 1901 Census records the family as Thomas, Susan Ellen and their five children: Lillian Mary (7), William John (6), Thomas George (4), Christopher Robert (3) and 3 month old Reginald Alfred. At the time of the census they also had a visitor, Bertha Bradford, who was the younger sister of Susan Ellen. The family home was Pentwyn Cottage in Newbridge which only had three rooms and so must have been quite a squeeze for eight occupants.

In common with most of the residents of the area, Thomas George's father was working as a Coal Miner Hewer.

The 1911 Census sees young Thomas George Coombs as a fourteen year old Coal Miner Hewer who is still living at the family home which is now Ty Nancy(?) cottage, Old Cwmdows, Newbridge.

Thomas and Susan Ellen have added three more children to their family since 1901, they now have Elsie Berthina (7), Irenie (2) and Aiden (5 months) in addition to Lillian Mary (17), William John (16), Thomas George (14), Christopher Robert (13) and Reginald Alfred (10).

By 1911 Thomas (senior) has left the colliery and has set himself up as a greengrocer but his three eldest sons William, Thomas and Christopher are all working underground as coal miners.

### **Military**

Thomas George Coombs enlisted in the army and was posted as Private (17228) to the 6th Battalion South Wales Borderers.

Raised in South Wales in September 1914 the 6<sup>th</sup> South Wales Borderers were a part of the 76<sup>th</sup> Brigade of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division. Possibly because of the high numbers of miners in the unit, the battalion became the Pioneer Battalion of the 25<sup>th</sup> Division in February 1915.

The 6th (Pioneer) Battalion South Wales Borderers landed at Le Havre on 24/25th September 1915 and spent the winter in the Armentières sector doing heavy work in flooded trenches.

In the spring of 1916 the battalion was in the line at Vimy and Neuville St. Vaast where two companies did fine work consolidating the craters of mines blown under the German line. They were persistently shelled, and at times had to break off their work to repel an attack, but eventually handed over a thoroughly well-organised position to the relieving infantry. This exploit was rewarded with two MCs, and five MMs.

In the Battle of the Somme in the Summer/Autumn of 1916 the battalion was continuously employed. On one occasion they carried out a magnificent piece of Pioneer work by digging 700 yards of communication trench from one captured trench to another (the Regina Trench) under heavy shell fire. Only good discipline and a fine spirit could have accomplished this task, and the battalion was

## Newbridge War Memorial

deservedly complimented upon it.

Their next major engagement was at Messines in July 1917. Throughout April and May they were hard at work preparing for the battle, making communication trenches, tramways and roads, and building a bridge for tanks over the River Douve. In the attack on 7th June, in which the 5th Battalion South Wales Borderers, in the 19th Division, also took part, the 25th Division captured all their objectives. By the evening, two companies of the 6th had constructed 400 yards of trench tramway through the captured area, and two others had opened a road to within 300 yards of Messines, all in spite of continued hostile shelling and machine gun fire. By 15th June, when they were relieved, they had suffered over 100 casualties.

Early in August 1917 the battalion moved further north for the Third Battle of Ypres where the 25th Division relieved the 8th Division after the latter had been held up in its attack on the Westhoek Ridge. The combination of bombardment and rain had reduced the trenches to a fearful state, the mud thigh deep in places and movement impossible. Added to this the working parties were shelled by artillery and machine-gunned by aircraft. Eventually, on 10th August 1917, the 25th Division took the ridge. B Company of the 6th doing splendid work in consolidation. Its runner was conspicuous for his gallantry. Though hit in one eye, besides being buried three times when taking a message back he persisted in duly delivering it before getting his wounds attended to.

The following extract from the official War Diary of the 6<sup>th</sup> South Wales Borderers records the death of Pte. Thomas Coombs on 11<sup>th</sup> August 1917 along with Sergeant David Foulkes.

August  
1917

11th Coy. Detailed for extending C.T. held up by barrage and were unable to reach their Tank.

Major CRAWFORD died of wounds 10th inst.

Killed in action 16955 Sergt. FOULKES, 17288 Pte. COOMBES

Wounded in action 29588 Pte. CHARLES, 40118 Pte. OLIVER,  
42325 Pte. REID, 42045 Pte. CUNNINGHAM, 40155 Pte. HALES

(Foggy and rain)

It is quite unusual to find 'other ranks' referred to by name in a Battalion War Diary, normally it would be only be officers that are specifically named – other ranks casualties were normally given as a total only.

## Newbridge War Memorial



Sergeant Foulkes and Private Coombs fought and died together and are buried side by side in The Huts Cemetery.

This cemetery takes its name from a line of huts strung along the road from Dickebusch (now Dikkebus) to Brandhoek, which were used by field ambulances during the 1917 Allied offensive on this front. Plots I to X and XII to XIV were filled between July and November 1917. Plots XV and XI followed. Nearly two-thirds of the burials are of gunners as many artillery positions existed nearby.



17288 Private Thomas George Coombs - 6<sup>th</sup> S.W.B.



16955 Sergeant David Foulkes - 6<sup>th</sup> S.W.B.

### Sources

CWGC.org  
*Fact Sheet 6th South Wales Borderers (from SWB Museum)*  
*War Diary 6th South Wales Borderers*  
*1901, 1911 Census*  
*Soldiers Died in the Great War 1914-1919*  
*British Army WWI Medal Rolls Index Cards, 1914-1920*  
*Findagrave.com*