

Personal Stories

from World War I



Thomas Collins 5th Battalion Wiltshire Regiment

The Lion's Head Public House was located on the Common, Winterslow, opposite Weston Lane and flanked by the Shrippple (Cow Lane) serving the community until demolished; to be replaced by four homes in 2017. In the first decade of the 1900s the Collins family moved from London to Winterslow with the head of the family Thomas Collins taking over as licensee of the Lion's Head and with the family "living on the job". The family consisted of Thomas' wife Sara, daughters Elsie & Gladys and two sons David Thomas (known as Thomas) & William. Sara died in 1910, when the son Thomas was 18, and was buried in All Saints churchyard.

In 1914 The Great War started and at the age of 22 young Thomas enlisted in 1st Battalion of the Wiltshire Regiment, going on to serve in the 4th and 5th Battalions, the latter operating in the Middle East in Gallipoli and Egypt before moving to Mesopotamia (modern day Iraq).

On 6th November 1914 an Anglo - Indian force was deployed to what is now Iraq to secure the oil fields and prevent the German - Turkish alliance from controlling the Persian Gulf. The British offensive action began with the naval bombardment of the old fort at Fao, located at the point where the Shatt-al-Arab meets the Persian Gulf. At the Fao Landing, the British-Indian Expeditionary Force D (IEF D), comprising the 6th (Poona) Division was opposed by 350 Ottoman troops and 4 guns. After a sharp engagement, the fort was overrun. By mid-November the Poona Division was fully ashore and began moving towards the city of Basra. On 22 November, the British occupied the Basra after a short fight with soldiers of the Iraq Area Command under the leadership of the Governor of Basra. The Ottoman troops abandoned Basra and retreated up the Shatt-Al-Arab waterway.



On the 25th January the 5th Wiltshires, along with the Royal Welsh Fusiliers, were engaged with Turkish forces under cover of an intense British bombardment. A combination of the bombardment and trench warfare saw the Turkish line crumble with 100 Enemy troops captured. Before the Turkish counter-attack that night the defences were consolidated by the Royal Engineers, with the enemy repulsed.

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Commonwealth troops in Mesopotamia (Iraq)

The casualties were listed in regimental records as 2 Officers killed and 4 wounded, along with 33 other ranks killed and 110 wounded. Among the fatal casualties that day was Private Thomas Collins aged 25 and is named on the Amara War Cemetery.

His father had the following inscription added to his wife's headstone in All Saints churchyard.

*“Also of Thomas Collins
Beloved son of the above
Who was killed in action in Mesopotamia.
January 25th 1917 aged 25 years”.*

*“No time for the last fond handclasp
No time for last farewell
Not even the eye-glance meeting
To say what the heart would tell”.*

Mick Brown

Acknowledgements:

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Wikipedia

