

# Private. John Thomson



**4th Battalion  
Gordon Highlanders**

**Service no: 1715**

***28th April, 1915***

**Age: 18**

REMEMBERING

# SETTING THE SCENE



**GORDON HIGHLANDERS  
REGIMENTAL BADGE**

## Background

John Alexander Thomson was born in Inverurie and was the son of George and Helen Cheyne Thomson, of 35, Powis Terrace, Aberdeen. He served with the 4th Battalion Gordon Highlanders (Service number 1715) attached to 3<sup>rd</sup> Division.

John arrived on the Western Front on 19<sup>th</sup> February 1915 and survived for only two months. He joined his comrades while at rest at La Clytte, a small village in the Ypres Salient. They were on a rota which saw them spend a week at rest, then the same length of time in the reserve and front line trenches at Vierstraat.



**FRONT LINE TRENCHES AT VIERSTRAAT**

# JOHN'S LAST ACTION

## Vierstraat, Ypres

28th April 1915

The day Private Thomson died was described by a colleague as 'a dull, cold day'. There was 'stand to' at dawn when units routinely prepared to defend their positions, followed by a great deal of sitting around. Men would have breakfasted, visited latrines, taken a turn on sentry duty or tried to catch some sleep. It was generally at night that front line troops were most active, fetching and carrying, digging etc. Opposite them German snipers were vigilant and ever-present. Unlike the British they worked in organised units, excused the normal army routine of trench rotation. They used telescopic sight and worked in pairs – one with the rifle – and a spotter to watch for targets.

New recruits were especially vulnerable in the front line. They made basic mistakes such as peaking out into No-man's land to catch a glimpse of the enemy, spending too long in the latrine or failing to notice a displaced sandbag on the trench parapet. All these put a soldier at risk of a sniper's bullet – and they killed on average 3 soldiers per battalion per day. Such deaths were referred to by the army as 'wastage' and in 1915 they were losing around 2,000 men per day along the front – killed and wounded. Occasional deaths could also result from an artillery shell or a mortar but in such circumstances a single death was unusual. On the 28<sup>th</sup> April 1915, Private Thomson was the only soldier in his battalion to die. He is buried in Wytschaete Military Cemetery.



WYTSCHAETE MILITARY CEMETERY



Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regt. No.
THOMSON John J. A.	Sord. Highrs	Pte	1715/4
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Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
VICTORY	G/101 B2	238	K. in A. 28-4-15.
BRITISH	do	do	
15 STAR	G/1 B. (7)	555	
Theatre of War first served in	(1) France		Regt. No. amended Dutch Min. of War
Date of entry therein	19-2-15.		

K 1380.

Correspondence.

Address.