

Thomas Henry BENNY

- Born:** 1893, St Columb, Cornwall
- Occupation:** General labourer
- Enlisted:** Bodmin: 4th August 1914 (Pre-war Territorial)
- Unit:** 1/5th Duke of Cornwall's Light Infantry (TF)
- Rank/number:** Private: No.240266 (Also 2177)
- Death:** Died of wounds, 24th March 1918
- Detail:** Thomas was fatally injured as the British fought to halt the advancing Germans in their last-ditch offensive in the Spring of 1918. Two days after the enemy attacked on 21st March the 1/5th DCLI, whose primary function was to dig trenches and mend roads, were ordered to attack the German-held village of Verlaines to the south of St Quentin. The men, soldiers first and foremost, did not hesitate and charged. Thomas was mortally wounded.
- Age at death:** 26
- Military info:** The 1/5th DCLI, a Territorial battalion, was part of Devon and Cornwall Brigade in the Wessex Division. On mobilisation in August 1914 Territorials, who were not obligated to serve abroad, were asked to volunteer for overseas service. Those who agreed went to 1/4th DCLI and those who did not went to the 1/5th. The battalion remained in England until April 1916 when they were converted into a Pioneer Battalion and posted to France with the 61st (2nd South Midland) Division. They landed at Le Havre on 22nd May and took part in the costly Somme diversionary attack at Fromelles in July that year. On 20th March 1918 the 61st Division was holding the line at Holnon Wood about three miles west of St. Quentin when at dawn the following morning the German Offensive struck. Their courageous attack at Verlaines two days later became rightfully famous in the annuals of the Dukes. But the action is also notable for another reason. The 7th DCLI were watching the attack from close by and men of their battalion band, who had remarkably taken their instruments into the frontline trenches with them, suddenly struck up the regimental march as their comrades went into action. It was probably the last time that British troops were played into battle. Reporting Thomas Benny's death, the Cornish Guardian said he was a staunch member of the Wesleyan Sunday School and "beloved by all."
- Grave/memorial:** Thomas is buried at Roye New British Cemetery near Amiens, and honoured at St Petroc's Church, Padstow and on the Padstow War Memorial.
- Family info:** Father: Unknown. Mother: Mary Benny, born in Newlyn, Cornwall in 1873. Unmarried Mary was 20 when Thomas was born and she gave him her name.



This information was researched by Peter Smith, who is currently writing a book about Padstow's part in the Great War. Anyone wishing to correct errors or supply additional information can write to him at 24 Mallard Drive, Uckfield, East Sussex TN22 5PW. Also phone 01825 762226 or email smithpeter24@gmail.com

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