

Thomas Miller

(1896 -)

According to the 1911 census Thomas Miller (Junior) lived at 25, Defence Street, Bolton with his father, Thomas Miller (Senior), where they were boarders at the home of Ida Brunt, an American immigrant and her daughter Queenie.

1911 Census⁽¹⁾

Thomas Miller Senior	1872	b: Barrow in Furness	Concreter
Thomas Miller Junior	1896	b: Wigan	Varnisher
Ida Hinchcliffe Brunt	1872	b: Providence, USA	Dress Maker
Queenie Asprey Brunt	1897	b: Southport	Weaver

Thomas was now aged 15 and at that time was a Varnisher.

War Record⁽²⁾

Thomas joined the Army Reserve on 7th December 1915, at the age of 19 and records show that he was only 5' 4". By this stage he was living at 43 Bury Road, Edgworth and his occupation was shown as a "Gun Cotton worker", which was an important job during the war.

"Gun Cotton" involved making nitrocellulose by mixing concentrates of 3 parts Sulphuric Acid and 1 part Nitric Acid with water, this was then added to cut clean cotton waste. It was a highly flammable compound and two uses were for "Jam Tin" and "Racket" bombs.

The former was a favourite with the British and used jam or tobacco tins, sometimes with a wooden lid, which were filled with dynamite or gun cotton and packed with scrap metal and stones. From the top of the tin there projected a length of Bickfords fuse and this connected to a detonator. Each 1" of fuse represented approx. 1 second so it was imperative that an adequate length was chosen to ensure the safety of the person using the bomb but short enough to deny the Germans sufficient time to retrieve and throw back. Ideally the bomb would explode above the target to cause maximum damage / injury to the Germans.

The "Racket" bomb was preferred by the French and consisted of explosive attached to a wooden handle, about 19" in length, shaped liked a hairbrush, which was also lit by a fuse. A slab of gun cotton was wrapped in a sacking covering containing metal fragments attached to the handle. This was then thrown at the enemy.⁽¹⁷⁾

Probably as a result of his occupation he was not posted until 20.4.18, when he became a Private in the Lancashire Fusiliers (who were fond of using the jam tin bombs) but was subsequently transferred to 4th Reserve Battalion of the Monmouth Regiment on 7th November, 1918.

A further transfer took place on 6th January, 1919 to 3rd Battalion Royal Welsh Fusiliers (Private, Service No. 98349), and he was posted to Limerick in Ireland on 11th June 1919. On 10th October, 1919 he is "struck off" effective duty due to debility and he was demobilised on 9th November, 1919 and transferred to Class Z Army.

During his period of Service he is shown as having been in both India and South Africa, although it is not clear when this was.

Following his discharge he returned to Bolton, living with his father at 52, Cannon Street. His occupation is shown as a Bleacher and Dyer.

Research: Andrew Spencer

Standard References: 1, 2, 3, 32, 36 plus:

17 World War 1 Trench Warfare – 1914 – 18 : Stephen Bull