

Private John Thomas Doidge (10134) of the 8th (Service) Battalion, Devonshire Regiment was born late in 1891.

He was sent to France on 25 July 1915, died on 10 May 1916, aged 24 and buried in the Citadel New Military Cemetery, Fricourt, France.

Before joining up, he had been a farm labourer.

He was the son of John George, a platelayer, and Elizabeth Jane (Metters) Doidge, and the brother of George.

Stoker First Class George Doidge (K/12459) served on HMS Recruit, an R class destroyer.

He was born on 8 January 1894 and died on 9 August 1917, aged 23, when his ship was torpedoed and sunk in the North Sea by U-boat UB-16.

Before the war he had been a mason's labourer or builder.

He was the son of John George, a platelayer, and Elizabeth Jane (Metters) Doidge, and the brother of John.

Thomas and **George** were the sons of John George (1861-1933) and his wife Elizabeth Jane Metters (1861-1939) and grandsons of John Doidge (1829-1901) and his wife Elizabeth Woodman (1836-1895). John George was one week old on census night in 1861. John and Elizabeth were creative with the names of their other children. Their older son was William Walter Fuge Doidge and a younger daughter was called Zelah. John was a copper miner in 1861 and Elizabeth was a dressmaker. In 1871 John was still a miner but occupied 5 acres of land at Lamerton. The family had increased: Emma was 13, William 11, **John George** 10, Zelah 7 and Richard W was 3. Harry was born 3 years later.

John George and Elizabeth Jane Metters were married in 1886. By 1891 they were living by Lydford Station. They were both 30 and John was a Railway Packer. They had four children William Henry (b 1887), Alice Maude (b1888), Frederick (b 1889) and Louisa, who was 8 months old on the night of the census.

By 1901 John had become a Platelayer and their family had increased with the addition of **John Thomas** (b Autumn 1891), **George** (b 8th January 1894), Blanche Elizabeth (1896), Eva I (1897) and Ida May (1900). Frederick and Louisa were still living at home, but it is possible that William had died in the summer of 1895. Alice, aged 13, was working as a servant for the Spear family at Brinsabatch Farm on census night.

In 1911 John George and his wife, Elizabeth Jane were living at Mana Brith, West Blackdown. John, a Platelayer (Railway Permanent Way) was 50, as was Elizabeth Jane. They recorded that they had been married for 25 years at the time of the Census and had 14 children born alive, of whom 10 were still living. Louisa (20) was a general domestic servant, **John Thomas** (19) a farm labourer, **George** (17) a Mason's labourer or builder. Ida May was 11, Frank 9 and Albert Redvers was 7. All of the children had had their birthplace listed as Mary Tavy, except Albert who had been born in Brentor.

In 1911 George's sister, Blanche Elizabeth, was working at the Vicarage for the French Smith family. She married twice, becoming Mrs Cribb in 1915 and Mrs Beckerleg in 1942.

On 22nd September 1911 **George** signed on to serve in the Royal Navy for 12 years. He may have added a year to his age in order to do so, because the normal minimum age to start man's service was 18. He joined HMS Vivid, the training depot at Devonport, to train as a stoker. He was 5ft 3in tall, had light brown hair, brown eyes and a fresh complexion. He had a scar in the centre of his forehead.

His first sea going posting was to HMS Irresistible, a pre-dreadnought battleship and for the first year of the war was aboard HMS Berwick, an armoured cruiser. He then moved to HMS Milne, a destroyer, before being part of the first crew of HMS Recruit. She was one of the new R Class destroyers, launched in 1916. Her namesake, the previous Recruit, had been sunk by a U-Boat. Launched on 9 December 1916 HMS Recruit was either torpedoed and sunk on 9 August 1917 in the North Sea by the U-boat UB-16, or she may have hit a mine. She sank 3 miles north of the Noord Hinder light vessel off the Dutch coast. Of the crew of 82, 54 were lost, including Stoker First Class (K/12459) George Doidge.

After the First World War, an appropriate way had to be found of commemorating those members of the Royal Navy who had no known grave, the majority of deaths having occurred at sea where no permanent memorial could be provided. An Admiralty committee recommended that the three manning ports in Great Britain - Chatham, Plymouth and Portsmouth - should each have an identical memorial of unmistakable naval form, an obelisk, which would serve as a leading mark for shipping. The memorials were designed by Sir Robert Lorimer, with sculpture by Henry Poole. Plymouth Naval Memorial commemorates 7,251 sailors of the First World War and 15,933 of the Second World War.

George is commemorated on the Royal Navy Memorial on the Hoe, Plymouth, panel 22. His three medals, the 14 Star, the Victory and British War medal were sent to his father as next-of-kin. It is possible that by this time the family was living back at West Blackdown.

When war broke out **John Thomas** volunteered to join the army. He enlisted at Devonport and joined 8th (Service) Battalion, the Devonshire Regiment as a private (10134). The battalion moved to Le Havre on 25th July 1915 and it wasn't long before they were in action. The Battle of Loos started on 25th September 1915 and the Devons were in the forefront. They battled to reach the German frontline trench and held off repeated counter attacks until ordered to withdraw the following evening. During that time they lost 639 men including three officers.

The battalion was in no state for further offensive action until replacements arrived and were trained. Their next action would be on the Somme in the summer of 1916, but before that started John was taken ill and died on 10th May 1916 aged 24. John's Informal Will written in his own hand the year before, stated

*In the event of my death I give all my property and effects to my mother Jane Doidge West Blackdown Brentor Devon. In the event of her death to my sister Loisa Doidge West Blackdown Brentor Nr Tavistock Devon
Signed John Doidge 24-7-15 Pte 10134 8th Devon Regt*

He was buried in the Citadel New Military Cemetery, near Fricourt. His grave reference is V.E.16. Most burials here came from Field Ambulance casualties, probably indicating that John hadn't been ill for long. He qualified for the 15 Star, the British War and Victory medals. They were sent to his father.

