

## PRIVATE ALFRED LEONARD JONES

74064, 2nd Battalion, Devonshire Regiment

Died aged 18 on 27 May 1918

Remembered with honour on the *Soissons Memorial, Bois des Buttes, France*  
Commemorated in Tewkesbury on the Cross only and at the Church of St. Peter, Bushley



*Devonshire 2nd Battalion  
Battle Memorial*



*Battalion Croix de  
Guerre with Palm*



*Devonshire  
Regiment*

**ALFRED LEONARD JONES** was born in 1899 to George Jones from Tewkesbury and Ellen (formerly Nicolls) from Twyning. Alfred was recorded as Leonard Alfred Jones on the 1911 census and as 'Len Jones' in the *Tewkesbury Register* in 1918. He was the second of three sons, and was known as Len. George was born in Tewkesbury, the son of a river-based engineer, and was himself an engine driver at Healings flour mill. The family was living at 3 Victoria Cottages, Gravel Walk, in 1901 but had moved to Church End, Bushley, by 1911.

Len Jones enlisted sometime in late 1917, as a conscript. By that time localism meant little in the allocation of regiments and he joined the 2nd Battalion, Devonshire Regiment, a regular unit stationed in Egypt in 1914. The battalion returned in October 1914 and joined the 8th Division which landed in France on 6 November 1914 as reinforcements for the BEF. It remained on the Western Front, taking part in many major battles in 1915, 1916 and 1917.

In March 1918 the division was on the Somme when the Germans launched their Spring Offensive. The division was heavily involved in the first phase, *Operation Michael* (to the British, the *Battles of the Somme 1918*). Once the German advance had been stemmed, the division was one of several formations transferred to the Champagne region to rest and recuperate; it is quite likely that Len joined his battalion then as a reinforcement.

The British came under the command of the French Sixth Army and, despite protests from their commanders, the British were placed, albeit unwittingly, in vulnerable positions directly in

the path of the fourth phase of the Offensive, *Operation Blücher-Yorck* (to the British, the *Battle of the Aisne 1918*).

On 27 May the Germans launched a massive attack from the heights of the Chemin des Dames ridge, overwhelming the British defences. To buy time for the rest of the Corps to withdraw and reorganize, Pte. Jones's battalion made a stand at a place called the Bois de Buttes: '*When the gunners ran out of ammunition, single individuals would creep forward to ransack the packs of their dead and wounded lying between them and the Germans. Eventually ... the men were down to a few rounds each*'. This rearguard action cost 551 casualties but earned the battalion the epithet, '*Glorious Devons*', and in recognition of their courage the French awarded them the *Croix de Guerre with Palm*. The then Major B. L. Montgomery concluded: '*There is no doubt that this battalion perished en masse. It refused to surrender and fought to the last.*'

The battle took place over a period of days and, in the aftermath of the fighting, relatively few individual deaths could be pinpointed.

**Private Alfred Leonard Jones** was not reported missing by the *Register* until 29 June 1918. His records indicate that he was killed in action on the first day of the battle, 27 May 1918, although his medal records are less certain. His body was not recovered and he is commemorated on the *Soissons Memorial*. In addition, a granite memorial cross, dedicated to his battalion, was unveiled in 1921. His name appears on the Tewkesbury Cross as 'L. Jones'.

His older brother, Cecil George, served in the Machine Gun Corps and survived.