

GUNNER WILLIAM HENRY JONES

703, Machine Gun Corps

Died aged 39 on 3 September 1916

Buried with honour at *Delville Wood Cemetery, Longueval, France*; XXIV N 1

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey,
and also on the War Memorial in Trentham, Staffordshire



*Delville Wood Cemetery,
Longueval*



Gnr. W. H. Jones
[Trentham War Memorial Project]



*Machine Gun
Corps*

WILLIAM HENRY JONES was born in 1878 in Broadway, Worcestershire, the eldest of five sons of James Jones from Reading and Hannah (formerly Fullwell) from Defford; their ten children were all still alive in 1911. James was initially a Chief Whip with the North Cotswold Hounds in Broadway but became an inn-keeper, firstly at the Anchor Inn, Wyre Piddle, in 1911 and then the Wheatsheaf Inn in Tewkesbury from April 1914 to September 1918. In 1911 William was living at Cliff House in Atherstone, Leicestershire, working as a groom. According to his obituary in the *Staffordshire Weekly Sentinel* in November 1916, he had been a huntsman with the North Staffordshire Hounds for four years before the war.

William volunteered at Stoke-on-Trent in May 1915, enlisting in the Motor Machine Gun Service. This was formed in November 1914 as part of the Royal Field Artillery and was organised into Batteries to provide infantry divisions with extra mobile machine-gun firepower. The guns were fitted to motorcycles and sidecars, the men wearing an unusual uniform: leather gaiters in place of puttees, and goggles, gauntlets and weatherproof garments while riding. However, by late 1914 fighting on the Western Front had settled into static warfare and the opportunities for MMGS units to operate as a mobile force were limited, in many cases operating as conventional machine-gun sections until 1918.

William joined the 15th MMG Battery, formed on 29 May 1915 at Bisley, the MMGS training centre. The Battery joined the 18th (Eastern) Division on 22 July 1915 and accom-

panied it to France on 25 July, as confirmed by William's medal records. In May 1916 his unit, now 15th Battery, Machine Gun Corps (Motor Branch), was transferred to XV Corps just before the start of the *Battles of the Somme 1916*. Divisions of XV Corps took part in several phases of the campaign, including the *Battles of Albert, Bazentin Ridge*, the subsidiary *Attacks on High Wood and Delville Wood*.

Private William Henry Jones was killed in action on 3 September 1916, the final day of the *Battle of Delville Wood*, a successful but costly phase of the campaign. Known as 'Devil's Wood', it was the scene of vicious fighting and counter-attacks. A British counter-attack on 3 September failed to retake the lost ground and the final enemy elements were only driven out on 8 September. Given the date and the place of burial, it is reasonable to assume that William's unit was supporting 7th Division when he was killed. An officer wrote to William's father: '*Poor Jones was killed in action on September 3rd, whilst the Battery was under heavy shell fire. His death must have been instantaneous, as he was struck by a heavy shell. His comrades buried him where he fell. We have erected a small cross on his grave, which we shall replace with a larger one later*'. William Jones was buried in *Delville Wood Cemetery* and was the first man commemorated locally to be killed whilst serving in the Machine Gun Corps. He was awarded the '*1914-15 Star*' medal. A single man, his War Gratuity of £5.10s. was granted to his father in September 1919. Two of William's brothers also served but survived the war.