

PRIVATE ERNEST RICE

22016, 4th Battalion, Grenadier Guards

Died aged 20 on 27 September 1915

Remembered with honour on *Loos Memorial, France*; Panel 5 to 7

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Loos Memorial, France



Pte. E. Rice [Graphic 15/1/16]



Grenadier Guards

ERNEST RICE was born in 1894, the fourth son of George Rice and Rosannah (formerly Wilkes) who married in 1880. Both George and Rosannah came from Tewkesbury and they had a total of 11 children of whom nine were still alive in 1911. George was a flour miller's labourer and the family lived at Mythe Hook, Severn Side. Unfortunately, because Ernest was declared missing without an obituary being written, little is known about his youth. However, in 1911 he was still living at home and working as a farm labourer.

Ernest Rice is commemorated at the Abbey as a Volunteer in the 4th Battalion, Grenadier Guards, one of two new battalions created by the regiment at the outbreak of war to supplement the three existing regular battalions. The battalion was formed at Marlow in Buckinghamshire in August 1914 and moved to France on 14 July 1915 where it became part of the 3rd Guards Brigade, Guards Division.

Ernest enlisted in Birmingham later, sometime in January 1915 judging by his army service number. He arrived in France on 15 August 1915 to join his battalion, shortly before the *Battle of Loos* (25 September-18 October 1915), which was the largest British offensive mounted in 1915 and which was undertaken in support of larger French offensives in Artois and Champagne. *'The battle took place on ground not of their choosing, in an area utterly unsuited to an attack, without clear objectives and before stocks of ammunition and heavy artillery were sufficient; the battle was noteworthy for the first*

use of poison gas by the British Army. Despite heavy casualties, there was considerable success on the first day in breaking into the deep enemy positions near Loos but the opportunities could not be exploited, resulting in a costly stalemate.'

On 27 September, two days into the battle, the Guards Division, as part of the British reserves, was committed to the battle to continue the offensive. The 3rd Guards Brigade, including 4th Battalion, Grenadier Guards, was tasked specifically with capturing a heavily defended German strong-point known as Hill 70, beyond Loos village itself which had already been captured. Going through Loos village the battalion came under gas shelling and, in the confusion, split into two parts. The initial rush of Hill 70 went well with the attackers covered by the dead ground at the base of the hill. Approaching the top, however, the guardsmen immediately ran into scything machine-gun fire and were forced to withdraw to a position that could be defended in daylight.

Private Ernest Rice was killed in action on 27 September 1915, according to the casualty records, no doubt during the attack on Hill 70, although he was only reported missing in the *Register* on 20 November 1915. In the *Graphic* of 15 January 1916, his parents asked for information about his fate and published his photograph but to no avail. Ernest Rice's body was never recovered or identified and he is commemorated instead on the *Loos Memorial* at Loos-en-Gohelle. He was awarded the '1914-15 Star' medal.