

42) PLY/1345S Private George Benjamin **JONES MM**  
(St Mary's Aldermaston)

**Died** 8/10/18

1st RM Bn RN Divn Royal Marine Light Infantry

**Born** Woodhay, Berkshire

**Enlisted** Reading

**Residence** Aldermaston

**Awarded:** British War Medal  
Victory Medal

**Date arrived in theatre of war:** France 25/9/1916

Of the names on the Aldermaston War memorial at St Mary's Church, George Jones proved to be the most difficult to find due to the common surname and lack of further details!

George Jones was the son of Mary Jones of Fisherman's Lane, Aldermaston and was a retail butcher. He enlisted at the age of 18 on 19/1/1916 into the Royal Marines (originally Plymouth battalion) of the Royal Naval Division. At the declaration of the war on 4 August 1914, there was a surplus of some 20-30,000 men of the reserves of the Royal Navy who would not find jobs on any ship of war. It was recognised that this was sufficient to form two Naval Brigades and a Brigade of Marines for operations on land. This Division had been formed by Winston Churchill.



**Men of the Royal Naval Division undergoing training**

This unit would fight as an ordinary Army infantry Division, however, the personnel would retain all the rights and privileges of being a member of the Royal Navy. This would include the rank structure, their pay and the right to obtain permission to grow a full beard!



### **Men of the Royal Marine Light Infantry exercising their 'right!'**

As part of the draft of men destined to join the 2<sup>nd</sup> Royal Marine Light Infantry, George Jones crossed to France on 25/9/1916. Here he spent the next month at the infamous Etaples training camp, known as the 'Bullring'. Remarkably, he was returned to the Plymouth HQ as 'surplus' on 26/10/1916. Remarkable as the Royal Naval Division were about to fight on one of its most famous actions at the end of the Battle of the Somme near the village of Beaucourt, that would become better known as the 'Battle of the Ancre'.

George Jones stayed in the UK until 20/3/1917 when he was sent with a draft to the 3<sup>rd</sup> Royal Marine Light Infantry who were stationed in the eastern Mediterranean.

As part of the 'combing out' process, George was posted from Mudros (the harbour for the island of Lemnos that had been extensively used as part of the Gallipoli campaign in 1915-16). He was destined to be one of those to replace losses incurred by the 1<sup>st</sup> Royal Marine Light Infantry at the beginning of the German Spring offensive of 1918 – he joined them on 8/9/1918.



### **Royal Naval Division men - 1918**

The Royal Naval (63<sup>rd</sup>) Division was heavily involved in the final battles of the war in the Cambrai Area. Specifically they were involved in the actions in the Crossing of the Canal du Nord 27/9 to 1/10/1918. In this particular action, George Jones was recommended for a

gallantry award, the Military Medal. This was formally accepted and appeared in the London Gazette of 13/5/1919. Sadly, no specific citation was found for which this medal was awarded, though this would once have existed.

The Royal Naval Division continued their advance in this sector on 8/10/1918 leading up to the capture of Cambrai itself on 9/10/1918. On 8<sup>th</sup> October, the 1<sup>st</sup> RMLI were involved in the attack capture of the villages of Villers Outreaux and Niergnies. It was in these actions that George Jones MM was to lose his life, no further details are known. However, this action did see one of only two actions in the Great War where British tanks were to take on German ones (albeit captured ones):



Towards the end of the second battle of Cambrai, British Mark IV tanks of 12th Battalion confronted German captured Mark IVs. The ensuing battle was chaotic, emerging from smoke the Germans were initially mistaken as part of C Company, but at 50 meters both sides recovered from their surprise and opened fire simultaneously. The lead British tank L16 commanded by Captain Rowe was immediately knocked out, who escaped with his men to L19 just in time to see it destroyed, along with L12. The remaining tank L8 had broken down some distance back taking no part in the battle, although its commander Lieutenant Martel managed to use a captured 77mm artillery piece to finally halt the German tank.



**Niergnies battlefield today – this airport was fought over in 1940!**

George Jones MM body was recovered and together, with a number of his comrades of the Royal Naval Division, was buried in:

PROVILLE BRITISH CEMETERY, France, I. C. 28

## **PROVILLE BRITISH CEMETERY**



### **Location Information**

Proville is a village adjoining the town of Cambrai in the Department of the Nord.

### **Historical Information**

The village of Proville was captured on 8-9 October 1918 and the cemetery was made in the same month by the 61st Division and the 8th North Staffords. It was increased after the Armistice when 21 graves were brought in from the battlefields west of Cambrai. The dates of death are from the 20th September to the 19th October.

Proville British Cemetery now contains 149 First World War burials, 27 of them unidentified.

The cemetery was designed by W C Von Berg.



PLY/1345(S) PRIVATE RMLI.  
G. B. JONES. MM.  
ROYAL NAVAL DIVISION  
8TH OCTOBER 1918

