

Private D.S. Jones, RWF, Mametz Wood – 11th July 1916 (Age 21).



18663 - Private [David] Stanley Jones - 16th Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers.

Stanley was born at Dan-y-graig Farm (near the Maenllwyd) in 1895 to John (b.1859 - a woodsman on the Tredegar Estate) and Louisa Jones (b.1861). He was the younger of two sons, the eldest being [John] Edward (a milk vendor) born a year earlier in 1894. They all spoke Welsh and English. Stanley's Father John died 23rd May 1922 aged 63. He is buried in St James.

The inscription on the Ebenezer Chapel Plaque states that Stanley was killed in action on 9th July but a Notice placed in 'Y Goleuad' on 18th August 1916 stated he was killed on 8th July. However, the Army records state he was killed in action on 11th July, and the latter is likely the more accurate as the 16th Battalion was not committed to any attack on the 8th or 9th.

Y Goleuad (The Light) was a liberal weekly Welsh language newspaper distributed to Welsh Calvinistic Methodist groups throughout Wales and to the Methodist Welsh speakers of Liverpool, Manchester, Bristol, and London. Its content generally reflected denominational interests.

The Notice stated:

Jones – Gorffnaf 8, ar faes y frwydr, y Preifat D Stanley Jones (RWF, mab Mr a Mrs John Jones, Dan y Graig, Rudry. Cyn ymuno a'r fyddin yr oedd yn glerc yn Swuddfa Addysg Cyngor Sir Forganwy, yng Nghaerdydd.

(Jones – July 8, on the battlefield, Private D Stanley Jones (RWF, son of Mr and Mrs John Jones, Dan y Graig, Rudry. Before joining the Army he was a clerk at Glamorganshire County Council's Area Education Office in Cardiff.)

There is little we can find on Stanley's service but we know he joined the 16th Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers and his Army number indicates he joined at the onset of war in 1914 and was not a conscript.

The Battalion sailed for France on 29th November 1915 and went into the trenches in January 1916.

On 5th July 1916, Stanley and the 16th Battalion, relieved troops in trenches near Caterpillar Wood in preparation for an attack on Mametz Woods

Mametz Wood was the objective of the 38th (Welsh) Division during the First Battle of the Somme. It comprised 3 brigades made up from battalions from the Royal Welch Fusiliers, the South Wales Borderers and the Welch Regiment.

The wood (about a square mile) was defended by elements of the German Lehr Infantry Regiment and 163rd Infantry Regiment. These units were entrenched within the wood; the German second line was only 300 yards behind, allowing the position to be reinforced easily. From 6th July, the 38th Division conducted reconnaissance and probing attacks, to determine the strength of the German position.

On the 7th July 16th at 0800 hours, the primary attack began but it soon became obvious that the preliminary bombardment had failed to silence the German machine gun positions and German shells started to fall upon the attackers and the trenches they had left, resulting in a temporary communication breakdown.

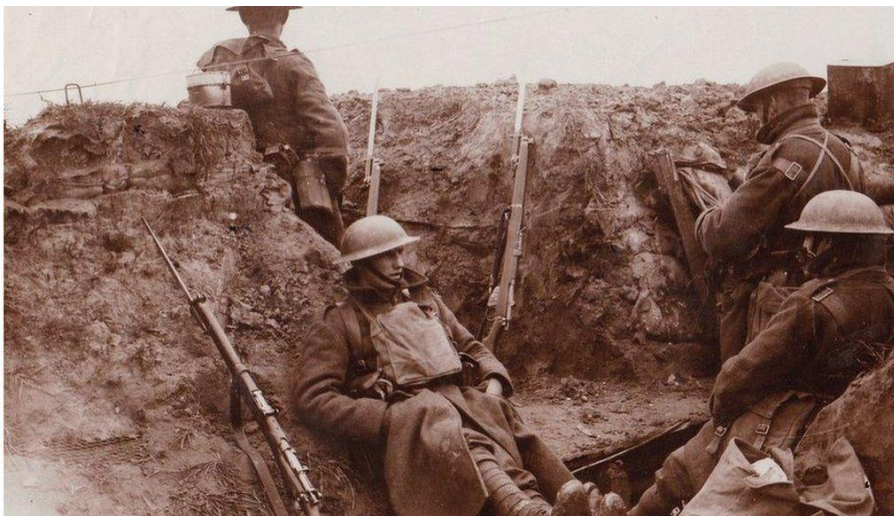
Caught between machine gun fire from their front and their flanks, the attack bogged down within 200 yards of the wood. Unable to move further, the troops were ordered to dig in to await a renewed British bombardment. At 1100 hours the troops tried again but were unable to push further forward.

A proposed third attack in the afternoon was called off. The 16th Battalion historian wrote that "cut to Ribbons would be an apt description" as casualties amounted to 276 men. The South Wales Borderers suffered 180 casualties.

Further attacks by the 17th Division on 8th July failed and a planned full-scale attack for 9th July was postponed.

On the 10th July, Stanley would have been preparing for the dawn attack by the 16th Battalion along with the 13th, 14th and 15th Battalions of the Royal Welch Fusiliers. The 14th and 16th were to lead, putting Stanley at the front of the action. They attacked in parallel lines or 'waves' with bayonets fixed and rifles held in the high port position, four paces between each man, 100 yards between each line with the 16th Battalion (and Stanley) leading for the 113th brigade with 14th Battalion close behind.

The official War Diaries of the 14th and 16th Battalions, Royal Welch Fusiliers note the singing of the hymn *Aberystwyth* in Welsh as the men waited to go 'over the top' in White Trench. It is likely Stanley would have been part of this as he was from a Welsh speaking family.



Royal Welch Fusilliers waiting in a trench before the battle of Mametz Wood

The commanding officer of 16th Battalion, Lieutenant Colonel Ronald Carden then called for quiet and spoke to the battalion before the assault.

"Make your peace with God," he said. "You are going to take that position, and some of us won't come back - but we are going to take it."

Tying a coloured handkerchief to his walking-stick he said: "This will show you where I am." A tall man, Carden was shot and fell during the attack but he struggled up and continued to lead the 16th to the wood where he was shot again and killed.

Despite heavy casualties the fringe of the wood was reached and some bayonet fighting took place before the wood was entered and a number of German machine guns silenced. Fighting in the wood was fierce with the Germans giving ground stubbornly.

This went on through the night and into the 11th, the day Stanley was reportedly killed. The remaining Germans offered determined resistance and the Welshmen also suffered from 'drop short' whereby their own artillery shells firing at their range limit would fall on their own men.

At 1445 hours on 11th July and despite the fact they had not asked for one, an artillery barrage began and the Welshmen ended up taking casualties from many of the rounds before launching their final attack at 1530 hours.



Despite this, the brigade was able to clear Mametz Wood by the end of the day.

We do not know at which point Stanley fell but 3,802 Welsh soldiers and 190 officers, were killed, wounded or missing [never found] in taking the wood.

The wood was essentially obliterated by the fighting and shelling as this picture of a section taken in August 1916 shows:



It's hard to imagine the what those young soldiers like Stanley went through but one, Robert Graves from the 2nd Battalion, Royal Welch Fusiliers described the scene as the 33rd Division entered the woods shortly after the fighting.

"Mametz Wood was full of the dead of the Prussian Guards reserve, big men, and the Royal Welch and South Wales Borderers of the new-army battalions, little men.

"There was not a single tree unbroken... There had been bayonet fighting in the wood. There was a man of the South Wales Borderers and one of the Lehr Regiment who had succeeded in bayoneting each other simultaneously."

Stanley is buried in the Dantzig Alley British Cemetery at Mametz with 2,052 other soldiers.



A memorial to the 5,000 men of the 38th (Welsh) Division who died on the Somme in 1916 was erected in 1987. The Red Dragon Memorial looks defiantly towards Mametz Wood, snarling and tearing at barbed wire.

