

Lewis Jones in World War 1

Lewis Jones was a principal artist and fabric designer for the Silver Studio from 1910 to 1953. Lewis Jones fought through the whole of the First World War. He seldom spoke of the war, but occasionally he reminisced to family about places and incidents. For instance, he said the smell of wood smoke always reminded him of Greece.

Lewis Jones (sometimes Louis Jones, usually known as Jack to family and friends) enlisted on 14th December 1914. He joined the Queen's Westminster Rifles (2/16 London Regiment), which had been formed three months before he joined up. His Regimental Number was initially 3617 and later 551113.



Lewis Jones at Saffron Walden, 1915.

The men were issued with old Lee Mitford rifles. The Regiment did training in Richmond Park, Wimbledon Common, and on Salisbury Plain for divisional training. They returned to London and marched to Watford and were in Cassiobury Park when they were provided with horses. They practiced digging trenches in Maidstone. In early 1915 they marched to Saffron Walden, and were under canvass during severe storms and flooding. There were regular raids by Zeppelins.

In the spring of 1916 they expected to go to France but instead they went to Ireland aboard the 'Inniskillin'. They landed at Queenstown and marched to Cork and Limerick. By then Sinn Fein had surrendered and handed over their modern German rifles. The Easter 1916 Rebellion in Dublin was over and the Regiment returned to England, and they were inspected by King George V at Warminster. Louis did not speak kindly of the Irish.

In June 1916 the Regiment went from Southampton to Le Havre on the 'Connaught' and 'St Pancras' transport ships, then by train to Petit Lourin [Horin], west of Arras. There was horrid confusion and mud, and the sky was bright from the "nightly display" of gunfire from about 20 miles away. The weather was stormy and they were drenched as they marched to the front. Finally they got to [Ecroves] Bois de Bray and "The Territorial" which was a communication trench from Zivy to Mareail [Mareenil] and the "Support Line".

The Regiment moved into the front line trenches with Vimy Ridge to the left and Thélus to the front. Here they were constantly strafed by "Minny" (or "Minnie", the German minenwerfer trench mortars), so asked the artillery to fire on the spot where Minnie lived. The first Military Cross for an officer of the Battalion was gained here, but he was killed a few days later. On 24th October 1916 they handed over to the Canadians.

The Regiment was told it was now part of the British Salonica Force (BSF). After extensive training they went by train to Marseilles and boarded 'HMT Transylvania'. In luxurious conditions and with glorious weather they sailed to Valetta in Malta where they waved to all the civilians on the liner 'Carnac' which was departing. The liner was torpedoed a few days later by a U-boat with great loss of life.

Their troopship safely reached the Gulf of Salonica at the end of November 1916. Here they learned that an assault landing was planned. They used the lighters that had been in the landings in Gallipoli and which still had bullet and shrapnel damage. The landing was made at Vromeri Beach and was unopposed. The Regiment then marched to Katerini to meet the transport section which had gone overland with 27 mules. The transport section with all the supplies had been unable to beach their lighters because of severe storms. The supplies arrived safely despite the unbroken mules and men unaccustomed to working them. One night the mules broke loose but were all rounded up. Lewis said he had no trouble with the "donkeys", probably because he could handle 'Nobbler' his father's unbroken stallion.

One day a German plane flew over and they fired with rifles and Lewis guns. It was shot down by "Archies" (anti aircraft guns). According to the Adjutant's book: for a while they passed the time with sports, and the officers went shooting; then news came that the Greeks had joined the Allies, and there were lamentations on leaving Katerini because they had been happy there.

In March 1917 they marched about 100 miles to the Dojran-Vardar front through the Vardar Marshes. Lewis said that during this long march they bought sheep bells from Greek farmers which they rang as they marched and they sang "The bells of hell go ding-a-ling-a-ling for you but not for me..." On the march the Russian troops who were with them started to fight each other when they heard of the 'Revolution'.

They waited to enter Karasouli after dark because previous units had been shelled there. There was a severe storm and flooding so that the next day they went in single file with water up to the knees. Stores were lost and it snowed.

After arriving at the front they took casualties from the Bulgarian artillery. Trenches were often only 18 inches deep. A pencil note by a previous reader in Adjutant Mare's book reads "none at all at times". They were not trained for open warfare and the constant shelling and unexploded shells "put the fear of gas in us" - gas shells and unexploded shells apparently landing with a similar sound. They were then withdrawn to Salonica. In the Balkans the Regiment had taken as many casualties as they had in France.

At Salonica they boarded 'HMT Manitou' and sailed for Egypt. They docked at Alexandria and went by train to Ishmailia, where Lewis was able to bathe in the Bitter Lake. Officers and NCOs were given leave in Cairo and Lewis rode a camel at the Pyramids.



Lewis Jones on a camel at the pyramids, 1917. Lewis is the rightmost camel rider.

The Regiment marched to Kantara (Al Qantarah El Sharqiyya) in North East Egypt, and the front line, to oppose the Turkish army. Outposts were manned by two in daytime, and one day Lewis Jones was wounded in the head and his comrade killed by a sniper. The comrade had shouted "Joner the tree!" before being killed. Nomadic Arabs found him, dressed his wounds and told him that he had shot and killed the sniper who had wounded him. During the time he was with the Arabs his parents received a 'Missing believed killed' telegram. He travelled with the Arabs until they were able to make contact with the British troops. On his return to the army he was sent to a military hospital, but he feared the chaotic conditions there so he simply walked out and rejoined his unit.

Adjutant Mare's book ends here and in the National Army Museum library's copy is a handwritten note: "Shortly after this the writer was wounded and left for base and later to London where he contracted influenza and died".

In November 1917 the Regiment was fighting near Gaza. It was not a peaceful Christmas because the Turks were determined to recapture Jerusalem. Orders then came to leave because there was typhus in Jerusalem. In March 1918 the battalion moved to Wadi Neria men to support the crossing of the Jordan, but the crossing was unsuccessful because of the strong current. They crossed the Jordan on April 1st and marched to a point NE of Jericho. Further advance was held up despite heavy fighting and they were withdrawn during May because their position was exposed.

After a period of training and defence construction, including a four day period when they worked night and day, they marched to Lod (Lydda) and then onwards by train to Kantara (El Quantara) and again to Alexandria for embarkation on 'HMT Indara', which sailed on 18th June 1918. In the Gulf of Taranto at 1am on 21 June a U-boat made an unsuccessful attack on the ship. Lewis never mentioned this and may not have known about it.

From Taranto they went to France by train arriving at Hazebrouck on 1st July. From here they marched in stages until they reached "Locre Sector" in Belgium where they held the line until 3rd August. After intermittent periods in the front line they were relieved on the 20th August and moved back to reserve. The 2/16 London Regiment was now split into A, B and C Companies and Sergeant Lewis Jones was with B Company.

On the 27th September the 90th Brigade was ordered to advance. The 2/16 London Regiment maintained its position until the 28th and then attacked and took their first objective just west of Messines. The objectives were held overnight. The war diary shows the regimental casualties as 3 officers and 16 other ranks killed in action, and 5 officers and 79 other ranks wounded during the period 28th to 29th September. Lewis said that their Medical Officer was the first to fall (the war diary records that "Capt. K Elmes (RAMC att'd) killed in action").

Sergeant Lewis Jones used the message form on the reverse of his trench map to write:

To O.C. Q.W.R. 2/16

1. I am at *Seaforth Farm U8C*

2. I am in touch with *Loyal North Lancs* on Right

3. I am not in touch with *Civil Services 2/14* on Left

4. Present strength *3 NCO + 10 OR (13)*

5. Held up by *Darkness* at *Seaforth Farm*

11. Send up *Reinforcements* soon as possible

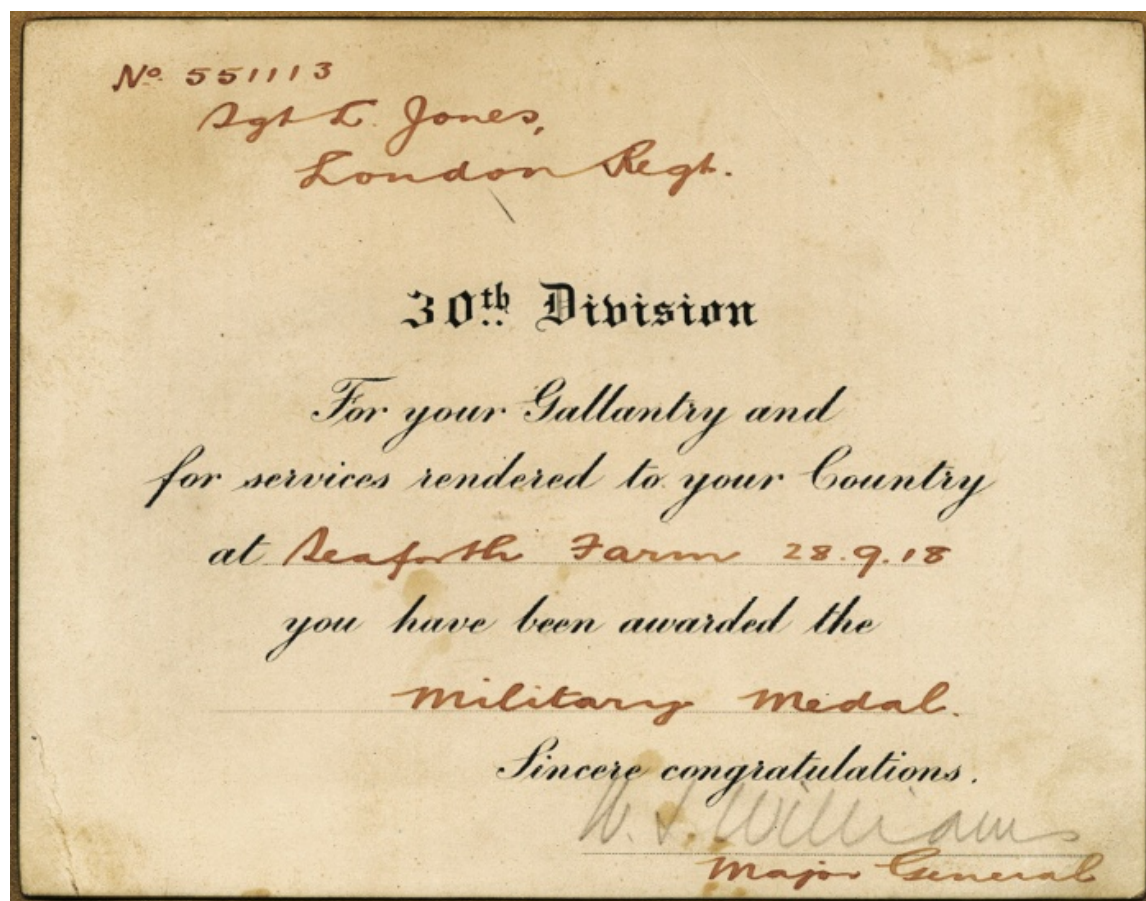
Signature *Sgt Jones*

Commanding *B Co*

Date *Sept 29th*

This message was never sent and is still held by his family.

Seaforth Farm was just south of Messine about nine miles northwest of Lille. The Loyal North Lancs had also taken heavy casualties. As senior NCO Lewis Jones led what was left of the two companies. For his actions at this time Sergeant Lewis Jones was awarded the Military Medal.



His citation reads:

Nº 551113 Sgt L Jones,
London Regt.

30th Division

For your gallantry and for
services rendered to your
Country at

Seaforth Farm 28.9.18

you have been awarded the
Military Medal

Sincere congratulations

W. J. Williams

Major General



Lewis Jones' Military Medal for his actions in 1918.

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Many years later Lewis Jones said that on that night he was preparing to repulse an expected counter attack. He had an additional problem of a number of enemy prisoners including an officer. He told the officer to return to the German lines with the other prisoners. The officer was reluctant at first, fearing they would be shot for "escaping", but they left under cover of darkness.

The regiment was then in the rear until 16th October 1918 when they moved into the front line again and began to advance, whilst the enemy was beginning to withdraw. Lewis Jones said he was in the village of Autryve (Outrijve near Kortrijk) in Belgium on 11th November 1918 when the war ended, and there was a Thanksgiving service

After a period of parades, company football and concerts the regiment started to move for home. He travelled to Calais by train and from the 25th December 1918 groups of about 25 men were sent back to England for demobilisation. At Crystal Palace in South London he left the army on 18th March 1919. On 9th August 1919 Lewis Jones married Annie Frances Carpenter. He returned to work for the Silver Studio after the war.



Lewis Jones with his wife Annie Frances, 1919.

This war biography was written by Lewis Jones' son Robert Jones, with help from other family members, and is available online at www.mooch.org.uk/serious. A full biography of Lewis' life and career can also be found at www.mooch.org.uk/serious.

*Additional information for this history was derived from the book "Some unofficial adventures of the 2nd Battn 16 London Regt The Queen's Westminster Rifles 1914-1916" by Adjutant Mare, held at the National Army Museum in Chelsea, and also from the "War Diaries" held at The National Archives. Using these sources it has been possible to give dates and more details of this part of Lewis Jones' life.

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