

# Christopher Jones

Private

11725

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, South Wales Borderer's



Christopher Jones was born at 29 Broken Bank, Kington in early 1889, the first of fifteen children born to Evan and Harriet Jones. Evan had the messy but important job of Chimney Sweep in Kington. The 1901 census shows that due to his expanding family Evan found it necessary to move them into No.2 Headbrook, Kington a marginally larger dwelling. Christopher attended Kington Boy's School but when the time came, like so many other young Kington men, he moved to the South Wales coal fields in search of work. It is not clear when Christopher moved south but we know he married Blodwen Evans in 1909, a girl from Dowlais just outside Merthyr Tydfil. Once married we find Christopher and Blodwen living at No. 4 Llanddewi Street, Aberaman just outside Aberdare and it's here that their son Claudian Evan Jones was born in 1910. In the 1911 census Christopher is recorded as being a miner/hewer. His was arguably the most dangerous job in the mines, being employed at the coal face literally cutting or hewing the coal. A difficult and challenging job it was no wonder that when the call to arms came Christopher immediately enlisted at Brecon into the South Wales Borderers, 1st Battalion, service number 11725. The battalion was one of the original units sent to France in August 1914, but records shows that Private Christopher Jones did not arrive in France until the 4th of January 1915. The Battalion War Diary hints at Christopher's fate.

In early 1915 the 1st Battalion, South Wales Borderers were in the trenches at Festubert, a small village 5 miles east of the larger town of Bethune. In January 1915 the whole area around Bethune was under extreme pressure from German forces. On the 12th of January, 240 'other ranks' new from home, arrived at Choques where they were met by the Quartermaster and marched to Bethune for billeting. On a rainy 13th of January the new draft arrived at Festubert and the front. The Battalion at that

time were behind the frontline resting and the new arrivals were immediately detailed to their new Companies, Christopher being allocated to 'B' Company. On the 14th the Battalion received orders to relieve the Black Watch at Givenchy to the south of Festubert. At 4:45pm they marched from Festubert and by 10pm had relieved the Black Watch. 360 men of 'A' and 'B' Companies were immediately sent into the frontline trenches. During the relief they were heavily shelled but when the shelling died down they then came under intermittent, but accurate German sniping. This persisted throughout the night. On the 15th and 16<sup>th</sup>, action was minimal and the companies were employed rebuilding and reinforcing their trenches and parapets. At 4pm on the 16th 'B' Company were relieved by 'D' Company, South Wales Borderers with 'B' Company being marched back to an area called Pont Fixe for some respite. On the 18th it snowed and rained heavily causing the state of the trenches to deteriorate, 'B' Company were again marched forward to the trenches. The next two days passed quietly but the Companies occupied their time by bailing out and reinforcing their trenches. On the 20th Christopher's Company were again moved out of the frontline and sent to the rear as Brigade Reserve at Le Preol. This respite only lasted a couple of days after which, on the 22nd, they were again marched back into the frontline. The Diary records that while they were advancing a large shell fell in their midst. No mention of casualties is reported but during the next two days their section of the front is reported as being quiet with no casualties mentioned. Christopher is recorded as being 'killed in action' on the 23rd January, but it is quite possible that he was injured or killed by the shell which fell on his Company on the 22nd.

Christopher is buried at Brown's Road Military Cemetery, Festubert, Pas-de-Calais, grave ref V.D.14. Another Private of the South Wales Borderers, Patrick Early, is also recorded as being 'killed in action' on the 23rd and like Christopher is buried at Browns Road Military Cemetery, perhaps he was another casualty of the shell. Christopher died having served just 19 days in theatre and for his short and uncomfortable service was awarded the 1915 Star, Victory and British War medals.

As for Christopher's wife Blodwen and son Claudian, after hearing of the tragic news of Christopher's death, Blodwen appears to have moved back to Dowlais to be near her family and is found living at 5 Alphonso Street, Dowlais. The news of Christopher's death must have been devastating and it appears Christopher's medals were never accepted by the family. On 30th June 1922 a request was received by the army for them to destroy the medals. The lives of Blodwin and Claudian had been thrown into turmoil and changed forever.

