



Private Ronald Grimes (Number 22837, 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, the Royal Warwickshire Regiment) is interred in Douai Communal Cemetery – Grave reference, Joint grave H.29.

The records of Ronald Grimes' military service are sparse. The dates of his enlistment and attestation appear not to have been documented nor does that of the day he joined the British Expeditionary Force on continental Europe. However, the fact that he is not entitled to the 1914-1915 Star implies that while he may have enlisted during the first two years of the Great War, he did not join his unit on *active service* in the field until the third year of the conflict, 1916.



Furthermore, the recorded (in places) service of Private Grimes with both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of the Warwicks leads one to believe that this was also the order in which he was attached to them.

*\*However, there appears to be little further evidence of Private Grimes serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Regiment. The Forces War Records web-site has him with the 1<sup>st</sup>.*

Both the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalions of the Royal Warwickshire had been ordered to the Continent in 1914. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion had fought in the Retreat from Mons and then in the Race to the Sea, the campaign which ensured the static nature of the Great War for the next few years. It had been stationed in Belgium at the time of the *Second Battle of Ypres*, then in northern France until 1916 when the British assumed responsibility for the area of *the Somme* from the French.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion had arrived on the Continent in October of 1914, in time to play a role in the *First Battle of Ypres*. In 1915 it also had fought in northern France and had remained there until it too was called upon to serve at *the Somme*.



*(Right: An aerial photograph, taken in July of 1915, which shows the shell of the medieval city of Ypres, an image entitled Ypres-la-Morte (Ypres the Dead) – By the end of the conflict there was little left standing. – from Illustration)*

The places to which the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Royal Warwickshire Regiment, 10<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade, 4<sup>th</sup> Division, was posted in the year 1916, as well as the dates of those postings, are uncannily similar to those of the Newfoundland Regiment, so much so that Private Grimes may well have met some of his co-patriots during this period: the Royal Warwicks had not served in Gallipoli and were already *in situ* in the area of *the Somme* by the time that the Newfoundlanders arrived in mid-April – Acheux, Forceville and particularly Mailly-Maillet were villages in which they at times were billeted.



*(Right: A part of the re-constructed French village of Mailly-Maillet with its Monument aux Morts in the foreground – photograph from 2010)*

The day after the disaster of July 1, Private Grimes' unit occupied the trenches near Beaumont-Hamel and was also posted to adjacent Auchonvillers and as always, Mailly Maillet. Towards the end of July, as did the Newfoundlanders, and only days apart, the Warwicks withdrew – on foot – to Beauval and then to Candas to entrain for Belgium.



*(Right above: Part of the annual harvest in a farm-yard in the village of Auchonvillers: French Army bomb-disposal teams collect this hundred-year ordnance on a regular basis and destroy it. – photograph from 2010)*

They then served in the *Ypres Salient* in the area of *Hill 60*, not very far removed from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland Regiment who were entrenched at the time at *Railway Wood*.

(Right: *The city of Ypres towards the end of 1915 – some six months after the 6<sup>th</sup> Division arrived on the scene: it was already looking much like this by the end of May, 1915 – from a vintage post-card*)



(Right: *Hill 60 as it remains a century after the events of the Great War in the area of Mount Sorrel, the village of Hooze, Sanctuary Wood and Maple Copse: It is kept in a preserved state – subject to the whims of Mother Nature – by the Belgian Government – photograph from 2014*)



Then, again, only days before the Newfoundlanders, they were ordered south and back to the area and battle of *the Somme*.

On October 11, Private Grimes – if indeed he was still serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion – was ordered to attack the German line in the area of the village of *LesBoeufs*. On the following day it was the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion of the Newfoundland unit which advanced at *Gueudecourt*, just up the road.



(Right: *The Guards' Cemetery, Lesboeufs, in which lie some three-thousand two-hundred dead – photograph from 2010*)

Both battalions then spent the remainder of the autumn in the same sector until Christmas when the Newfoundlanders retired into *Corps Reserve* near *Amiens*, to the west of the provincial town of *Albert*; the English unit retired a little later, although not quite as far to the rear.

Two questions now arise: firstly, if and, if so, when did Private Grimes transfer from the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion to the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion of the Warwickshire Regiment? - and then, secondly, since Private Grimes ended the conflict in the hands of the Germans, where and when was he taken prisoner? Once again, due to insufficient documentation, any hard and fast conclusions are difficult to come by – it can only be said that he was likely captured while serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion.

The occupied northern French city of *Douai* also served as a medical centre for the Germans during the *Great War*. It was here that Private Grimes was reported to have died in captivity on May 7, 1917, almost certainly in hospital *of wounds*.



(continued)

**(Preceding page: *The reconstructed medieval belfry dominates the city centre of Douai a century after the German occupation of 1914-1918. – photograph from 2017*)**

Thus the probabilities - if he had been serving with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion - are: either that he was wounded during one of the smaller operations undertaken as the Germans retreated to their newly-built defensive system designated by the British as the Hindenburg Line – from March 13 until April 4; or less likely - as the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion was used in a reserve role at the time - that he was wounded during the first days of the *Second Battle of Bullecourt* – fought from May 3 to 17\* and taken prisoner.

*\*However, just to confuse the issue a bit more, the British Army Ledger of his personal effects makes no mention at all of him being with the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion. In that case he was surely wounded and taken prisoner either during the First Battle of the Scarpe near the Wancourt Ridge between April 9 and 14 (inclusive) or near the village of Fresnoy on either May 3 or 4, days before his death.*

The son of William Grimes, Superintendent of Police, and Lavinia Grimes\* (née Fry, deceased 1921) of Fort Townsend – later of 42, Pennywell Road, he was also brother to Stanley-Gordon, to Rupert (Company Sergeant Major, Newfoundland Regiment, Number 773), to Mabel, to Gladys and to another sister whose married name was either Stevens or Andrews. He also half-brother to George Frederick Arthur Grimes whose mother was Emma White\* (see below).

*\*An Ancestry.ca web-site has Lavinia as being his fourth wife, the others named as Rhylla Dowden Torraville, Emma Elizabeth White and Miriam Whitingham. The same site also records William and Lavinia as having only three children.*

Private Grimes died at the age of twenty years and shares his last resting-place with a Private A. F. Messenger of the East Yorkshire Regiment.

Private Ronald Grimes was entitled to the British War Medal (left) and to the Victory Medal (Inter-Allied War Medal).

*Any further information a propos the military service of Private Grimes would be welcomed.*

