



PRIVATE ERNEST DOUGLAS BONE

SERVIVE NO. 18241

2nd BATTALION, ROYAL IRISH REGIMENT

DIED 22ND MARCH 1918 AGED 39

Ernest Bone's story was first told in the Spring 2014 edition of the Journal and is reprinted below.

Ernest was the fourth son of Robert and Lavinia Bone born on 26 April 1879¹, two and a half years after his brother Albert, who was also named on the War Memorial. They were both baptised on 2nd October 1885. They both attended London Road Board School, Ernest between March 1886 and March 1890. In his teens he seems to have been more mischievous than Albert, having been called before the local magistrates at Odiham Petty Sessions on three occasions. The first, on 11 December 1894, was when two 'mischievous boys' were prosecuted under the Education Act. The Reading Mercury reported –

*"Ernest Bone and Joseph George Girle, boys, whose parent live at Odiham, were summoned for placing a string across a public footpath leading through the Odiham Churchyard, for the purpose of tripping up people passing. The defendants were each fined 4s."*²

The next two occasions were in 1901. In January, Ernest and Henry Silver, of Hazeley Heath, were ordered to pay 10s each for using bad language on the public highway³. Neither attended this session. In March, "Ernest Bone, of Odiham, was ordered to pay 13s.6d. for trespassing in search of rabbits in Readon Copse, Odiham on the 3rd March."⁴ In 1903 Ernest married Annie Child, who in 1901 had been living in West Street⁵. By the time of the 1911 census, Ernest, a farm labourer, and Annie had three children, Esther, Robert and Alfred. The family lived at Broad Oak⁶. In 1912 a daughter, Elsie, was born, followed in 1915 by another, Lavinia. Sadly Lavinia died in 1918, several months after her father⁷.

¹ London Road Board School Admissions Register

² Source - The Reading Mercury, 15 December, 1894, p.4

³ Source - The Reading Mercury, 5 January, 1901, p.4

⁴ Source - The Reading Mercury, 23 March, 1901, p.4

⁵ 1901 Census, Odiham, Hampshire, ref. Class: RG13, Piece:1102, Folio:24, page no.: 23

⁶ 1911 Census, Odiham, Hampshire, ref: Class: RG14, Piece: 6248; Schedule Number: 88.

⁷ Details given by family member



Ernest attested at Hartley Wintney on 3 June 1916 and became number 34174, The Hampshire Regiment. However, he possibly had an exemption on the grounds of his marital status, his age or his occupation, for he was not called up until 26 January 1917 when he was posted to 3rd (Reserve) Battalion, The Hampshire Regiment⁸. It is not known how long Ernest was in this reserve battalion, but his 'Soldiers died in the Great War 1914-1919' record indicates that he may have first been deployed overseas in 1918. This was a time when the British Army was depleted, morale was low following Passchendaele and there was the belief that a defensive battle to maintain the front line was to be fought in March 1918. This would be the time when all the reserve battalions were called upon to fill manpower gaps in whichever battalions holding the front line were in most need. Ernest was transferred first to The Royal Dublin Fusiliers with a new service number, 40590, and finally to the 2nd Battalion, The Royal Irish Regiment as Private 18241⁹. From 'The Campaigns and History of The Royal Irish Regiment'¹⁰ we learn of the events of the last two days of Ernest's life and the beginnings of the 1918 Battles of the Somme.

The 2nd Battalion was at St Quentin on 21 March, the day when the German advance and British retreat began. Between 04.30 and 09.30 it was subjected to a 'heavy barrage, with a large proportion of gas shells' (p.57, Pt.5, 1918). It was a misty morning with poor visibility, not helped by the need to wear gas masks. Furthermore, telephone wires had been cut by the advancing German army. These two factors made communications within the Battalion and the Brigade difficult. By 10.00, the Germans had advanced to the Headquarters dugout, but were successfully repelled by bombs and rifle fire. By 13.30 enemy infantry had advanced on both sides of the Battalion and were forcing gaps through the front line. The next enemy tactic was to bomb the northern end of Irish Trench and attack the southern end with machine gunfire, but thanks to a successful charge by the Battalion the occupants were able to attempt a retreat to Ste Emilie under continuing German attacks. Very few were successful. During the following days a "steady retirement was carried out, successive defensive positions being occupied" (p.58) but, all the while under extreme pressure and lack of co-ordination due to breaches of the front line. It was during this 'steady retirement' that Ernest was killed in action on 22 March 1918, another day of thick mist and constant attacks.

Ernest was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal¹¹. He is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial, Somme, France.

⁸ Source – Details kindly given by The Hampshire Regiment Museum

⁹ Source - British Army WW1 Medal Rolls and Index Cards, 1914-1920. www.ancestry.co.uk

¹⁰ Geoghegan, Br. Gen. S, 'The Campaigns and History of The Royal Irish Regiment 1900 – 1922'

¹¹ Source - British Army WW1 Medal Rolls and Index Cards, 1914-1920. www.ancestry.co.uk