

Arthur Tonn
Private, 1st Kings Own Royal (Lancaster) Regiment
 Service no. **27049**
 formerly with
3rd Btn Lincolnshire Regiment
 Service no. **16133**



Date of birth	Date Killed in Action	Age
16 th Sept 1884 ¹	23 October 1916	32yrs

Background: Arthur Tonn

Arthur Tonn was born in Hykeham, Lincolnshire in 1884. His parents were Philip Tonn (1853 – 1918) born in Germany to British parents and Mary Tonn née Taylor (1860-1897). The Tonn Family on the 1901 Census shows them in Reepham, near Lincoln, as follows:

Philip Tonn 48yrs. Widower. Ironstone Quarryman.

Arthur Tonn 16yrs. Agricultural Labourer b. Hykeham

Henry b. Hykeham c 1888²

Lilly Tonn 13yrs b Hykeham c 1890

William Tonn. 7 yrs b Hykeham c 1894

The 1911 census shows the Tonns were still in Reepham, where Arthur's mother, Mary is buried. Philip is also buried here.

Arthur, a farm labourer, married **Harriet Bee (née Peet), a native of South Collingham**, on Oct 18th 1905 in St John the Baptist Church. Harriet was visiting her parents in Brough in 1911 when the census was taken. It shows she had been married for 5 years and had had 3 children, 2 still living: Eva Tonn 3 yrs b. Collingham c 1908 & George Philip Tonn 19mths b. Carlton on Trent c 1909. Also at her parents' home at the time was her brother, **Jack Peet Bee**, killed in action July 20th, 1916 (see separate profile). Arthur Tonn has not been found on the 1911 Census, however, his attestation paper shows that in 1915 the family lived in Ludford, Lincolnshire. His family at that time was:

Arthur Harriet Tonn & children Eva George & another daughter Lily (Lilian) born Thorpe-on-the Hill 1912. Harriet moved back in with her mother³ soon after Arthur was called up and was living on Besthorpe Road, Collingham from 1916 onwards. The various addresses show the itinerant lifestyle of many agricultural labourers & their families.

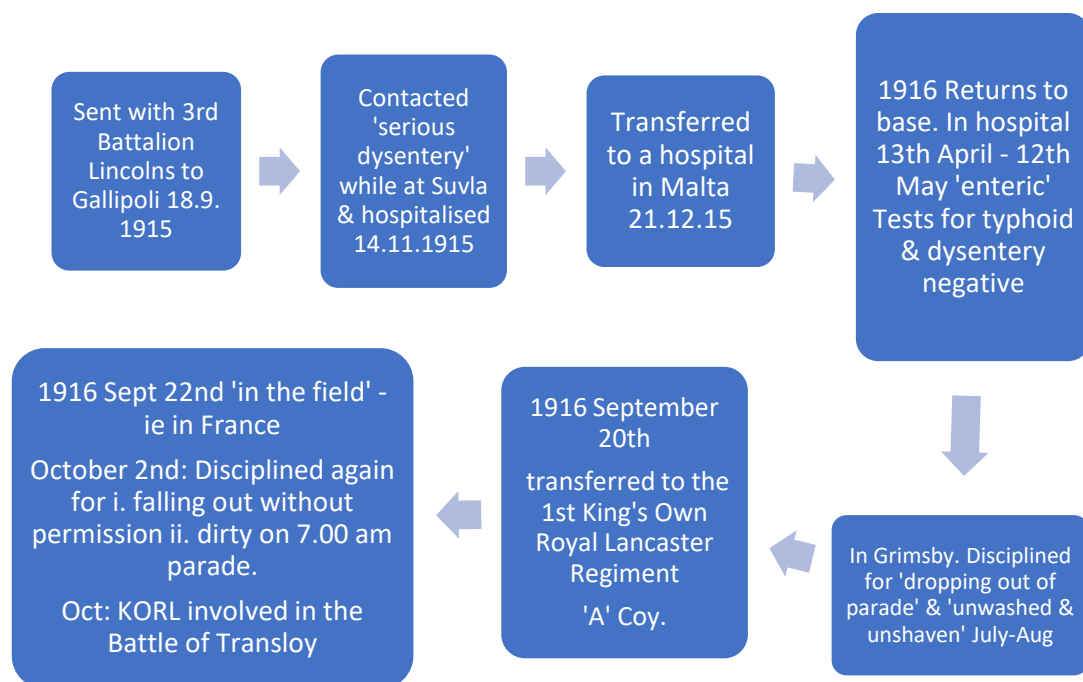
¹ A list of dates in Notts Archives (Ref **PR/23,030/2**.) states Arthur Tonn was born in 1883. Ancestry gives birth date 1884 confirmed by C Stothard

² On the 1911 census Henry, 23, is given as 'afflicted – feeble minded'

³ From a note in Arthur's army records

Military History: Pte. Arthur Tonn

Arthur's attestation paper shows he was 5'3 ½" ins tall and 100lbs in weight (7 s 2lbs) when he enlisted at Lincoln on 31st March 1915. He was initially assigned to the 3rd Battalion Lincolnshire Regiment and posted on 7th April 1915. His military service record shows the following details:



NB: Arthur Tonn's poor disciplinary record reflects either a disregard for orders or perhaps fatigue/depression following his earlier bout of dysentery. If he only weighed 7 st when he attested, he'd be weak after losing fluids & weight. Dysentery and typhoid were rife among soldiers, especially when in the unsanitary conditions of the trenches with shared latrines. There were 251 deaths from dysentery Aug -Oct 1915 in the Dardanelles⁴.

The King's Own Royal (Lancashire) Regiment

The King's Own Lancaster Regiment 1st battalion were part of the 12th Brigade / 36th Division in 1916. After being involved in the Battle of Albert and Pozieres that year, they were engaged in the taking of Les Boeufs (Battle of Transloy) near Bethune.)

On the 23rd October, the battalion was involved in the **Capture of Spectrum Trench.**⁵

Spectrum trench was held by the Germans and there was an urgent need to clear it so it could be occupied for an operation planned by the 4th Division for 15th October. This

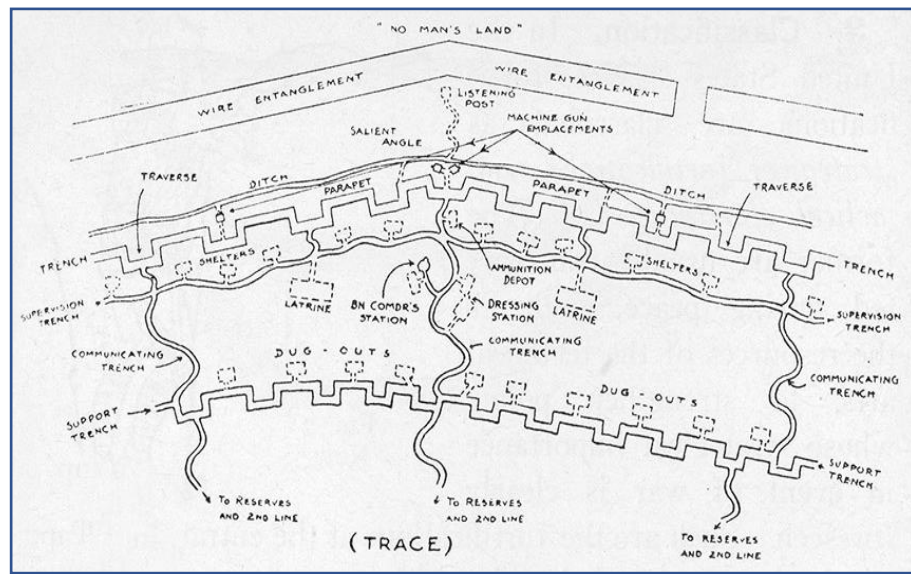
⁴ Source: <http://blogs.lshmt.ac.uk/library/2014/11/11/dysentery-ww1/>

⁵ <http://www.kingsownmuseum.com/141-days-spectrumtrench.htm>

directive was no mean undertaking. German trenches were notoriously difficult to attack, being deep, on higher ground and well protected by barbed wire and mortar fire and snipers. The British infantry relied on the artillery to bombard the trenches beforehand but this was not always successful.

The KOLR, along with the Duke of Wellington's, had been engaged in taking Spectrum trench since October 8th. Although gains were made in time for the offensive on the 15th, Spectrum was still held in parts by the Germans and on 23rd October another push took place. An extract from the battalion history quoted on the Invasion Zone Great War Forum website details what happened next. Pte. Arthur Tonn was in 'A' Coy:

'At 5 a.m. all was ready, the operation being planned for 11.30 a.m., but when day broke the mist was so thick that it was decided to put it off until the afternoon. At 2.30 p.m. the barrage came down and crept slowly forward followed by 'C' and 'D'



Above: Sketch of a typical trench showing the complexity of the various tunnel system

Companies, who at last succeeded in driving the enemy out of Spectrum trench and went on to secure the first ridge.

Here they came under heavy fire, and as the battalion on the right had not reached the objective the King's Own flank was in the air. Consequently, these two companies had to withdraw to Spectrum trench. 'A' and 'B' Companies set out ten minutes after 'C' and 'D' with object of passing through the position on the first ridge and carrying another beyond. As soon as they left Thistle trench these two companies were so heavily shelled that they were unable even to reach 'C' and 'D', let alone pass through them. A few individuals may have joined the forward companies before they started to withdraw; others met them on their way back and retired with them; all the survivors were in Spectrum when the Germans counter-attacked.

*Sergeant F. Beard was largely responsible for the inability of the enemy to regain the trench, which was now wholly in British hands. He established a barricade and remained in charge of it for thirty hours, during which time he repelled several bombing attacks. The day's work cost the battalion four officers killed and two wounded, **a hundred and twenty-six other ranks killed, a hundred and eighteen wounded and forty-three missing.** Captain J. A. G. Leask and Lieutenant S. F. Jewers were the only two officers other than those at battalion headquarters who went through the attack unscathed.*

These operations were described by an officer who was there as the worst experienced by the battalion. The weather was cold and wet, the mud sticky and greasy, the trenches shallow and confined, and the enemy's shelling accurate and unceasing. '

Extracted from "The King's Own, The Story of a Royal Regiment, Volume III, 1914-1950," by Colonel J. M. Cowper via the Great War Forum 'Invasion Zone' website posted 2009.

Private A. Tonn is buried at the Guards' Cemetery, Lesboeuifs Plot IV. Y. 9 He is also remembered on the South Collingham War Memorial and Roll of Honour in St John the Baptist Church.



Left: Private A. Tonn's grave, Guards' Cemetery, Les Boeuifs, France. Inscription reads 'Thy Will Be Done.' Source: Nottinghamshire County Council Roll of Honour website. Photo by Murray Biddle with kind permission

Harriet Tonn never remarried. She lived on Besthorpe Road, Collingham for the rest of her life with her children. Harriet died in 1954 aged 74. She is buried in North Collingham Churchyard as is son, George Philip Tonn, who died in 1940, aged 31, and Eva who died in 1976 aged 68. Neither George nor Eva appear to have married. It is unknown what became of Lily.

See also profile for Arthur's brother-in-law Jack Peet Bee (died of wounds July 20th in the Battle of Albert 1916).

Sources:

With thanks to Jeremy Lodge for his initial research on Arthur Tonn 2014 & 2016

Jeremy Lodge Sources:

- ⦿ <http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/543745/TONN,%20A>
- ⦿ Simpson, C R. (1931) *The History of the Lincolnshire Regiment 1914 – 1918..Compiled from War Diaries, Despatches, Officers' Notes and Other sources.* The Medici Society.London

- ⦿ Churchill W S. (1923) *The World in Crisis. 1915* Thornton Butterworth

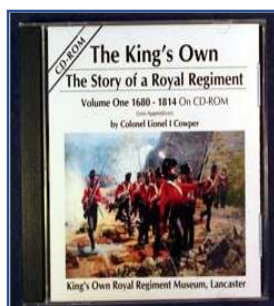
2018 Additional Research Sources:

- ⦿ Census Returns and Arthur Tonn's full military record including medical details via Ancestry.co.uk
- ⦿ East Trent Genealogy database
- ⦿ The Long, Long, Trail website
- ⦿ The Great War Forum website
- ⦿ Peter Donnely, Curator at The King's Own Museum, with many thanks for his advice & help
- ⦿ Website: <http://www.kingsownmuseum.com/index.htm>

Visit: **The Kings Own Regimental Museum, Lancaster**

The Regimental Museum is located within the City Museum, Market Square, Lancaster. The Museum is open Tuesday to Sunday (and bank holiday Mondays) from 10am to 5pm and admission is free. Telephone 01524 64637 for more details.

CD Rom:



Colonel Cowper's regimental history is available on a CD Rom from the Museum Shop here:

<http://www.kingsownmuseum.com/salescowpervol1.htm>

The King's Own, The Story of a Royal Regiment, Volume III, 1914-1950, by Colonel J. M. Cowper first published 1939.

HP 1/4/2018

