



CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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Welcome!

We will be holding our branch AGM on Thursday, 16 November and once again Paul Haigh has kindly offered his home in Hatherley Court Road, Cheltenham as a venue. All are of course welcome and encouraged to attend as all input - positive or negative - is very much welcomed; just let me know of your intentions so that we can prepare accordingly.

It is also that time of the year when I put out my request for speakers for our Christmas meeting. I'm after two ten or so minute talks on (however tenuous) a Great War related subject. If you feel that you would like to offer your enthusiasm and knowledge then please let me know - we would love to hear you! The December meeting is shaping up to be a great evening as we shall also have three pupils from Kingham School presenting five minute talks on their own Great War projects.

A little out of our neck of the woods, but I thought that possibly some of our members may be interested in a talk being given

tomorrow night at 7.30pm by Peter Wilkinson CB, CVO on the Battle of Jutland. The talk will be given at the Woodcote Village Hall, Reading Road, Woodcote RG8 0QY and further information can be found on the British Modern Military History Society website: www.bmmhs.org.

Finally, don't forget that on 4 November we shall be doing our free pop up Family Military History research event here at the Folk from 11am to 2pm. It is open to anyone interested in researching servicemen or women who served in the First World War, military medals or other military-related documents and artefacts. We may be able to help with enquiries concerning other military conflicts, depending on the nature of the query. In the afternoon there will be the debut performances of *Somehow, Somewhere in France* - a powerful 45-minute play telling the true story of five brothers from the Welshman family from the Westgate Street area of Gloucester during the First World War.

Peter

Future branch events

Tuesday, 14 November

*Retribution to Redemption:
The 35th (Bantam) Division, 1914-1918*
Professor Peter Simkins MBE FRHistS
The Ed Shed at 7.30pm

Few episodes in the massive expansion of the British Army in 1914-1915 more graphically illustrate the haphazard, improvised and often reactive nature of that process than the story of the 'Bantam' experiment and, in particular, the experience of the 35th (Bantam) Division. What began as a well-intentioned attempt to harness the patriotic spirit of men who, due to their diminutive stature, would otherwise have been denied the chance to serve their country, led, in reality, to disappointment and tragedy, principally because no one, at the outset, appears to have carefully considered the full implications of the scheme they had initiated.

Thursday, 16 November

Cheltenham & Gloucester Branch AGM
**22 Hatherley Court Road, Cheltenham GL51 3AG
at 7.30pm**

Tuesday, 12 December

Members' Evening
The Ed Shed at 7.30pm

For our December meeting we draw on the expertise and knowledge of our branch members. We will have a small selection of ten-minute length presentations on a Great War related subject of their choice.

After the presentations we hope you will stay to enjoy a glass of wine and a mince pie. Also, we will have our Christmas raffle and any prizes you can donate will be very welcome.

Major William Charles Christie

1st Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment

At the start of the Great War, William Charles Christie resided at Chesterton, Cirencester. Married with a young son, he was born in Cardiff on 13 December 1872, the son of a ship owner.

William was educated at Rugby School and Sandhurst and commissioned into the Royal Warwickshire Regiment in 1893. He was an accomplished long distance runner and rode, as an amateur jockey, in National Hunt events.

Promotion to Lieutenant followed in 1898 and to Captain two years later. In 1902, just short of 30 years old, he was rewarded for gallantry shown in the Sudan (1898) and the South African War (1899-1902), when he was twice Mentioned in Despatches, with the rank of Brevet Major – becoming the youngest Major in the British Army. The rank was made substantive in 1912.

Prior to the Great War, William undertook General Staff duties: from 1904-1907 he was Adjutant of the Militia and was a military instructor to the Officer Training Corps, where he acted as adjutant to the contingents from the Universities of Birmingham and Bristol and the Royal Agricultural College, Cirencester.

At the start of the Great War, he rejoined the 1st Battalion, Royal Warwickshire Regiment and landed in France on 22 August 1914. The battalion, part of 10th Brigade, 4 Division, was in



action three days later. He survived the Retreat from Mons and the Battles of the Marne and the Aisne, once again being twice Mentioned in Despatches for 'gallant and distinguished service in the field'.

On 13 October 1914 the Germans were holding the high ground along a ridge in front of Meteren, south of Ypres. The 1st Royal Warwicks were tasked with the capture of Meteren and Major Christie was leading 'D' Company. Once the outskirts of the village had

been gained 'C' and 'D' Companies advanced and took several trenches but suffered severely. They were not relieved until 8pm that evening due to heavy enemy fire. Reportedly Major Christie led his company forward showing, in the words of a brother officer, 'absolutely no sense of fear'. He was reportedly cut down by six bullets.

His body was recovered and he now lies in Meteren Military Cemetery. He is commemorated on the Cirencester War Memorial, the Roll of Honour inside Cirencester Memorial Centre and the War Memorial at Rugby School.

A brother officer from the 1st Royal Warwicks who was also wounded that day but survived being shot through the lung by a sniper, was Lieutenant Bernard Law Montgomery who went on to greater things in a subsequent conflict.

Graham Adams

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"When you go home, tell them of us and say, for your tomorrow, we gave our today."