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March 2009

## *For King and Country*

In March, a group trip was organised to the Everyman Theatre, Cheltenham to see *For King and Country* by John Wilson. This drama was written in 1964 and was filmed in the same year. It starred John Hurt, Dirk Bogarde and Tom Courtenay.

The play is set during The Third Battle of Ypres (11 July-10 November 1917) and centres on a young private, Arthur Hamp, who is accused of desertion. If he is found guilty the punishment is death by firing squad.

Hamp was a mill worker when he enlisted in the army. He had been in the trenches for three years and was the sole survivor of the group with which he joined up. He had endured the atrocities of the Great War, witnessing unimaginable sights, such as a comrade being blown to pieces in front of him, and he was nearly drowned in a shell crater.

He could stand no more and started to walk away from Passchendaele. He was eventually caught at Calais and returned to the company's HQ.

During the ensuing court martial, it soon became apparent that Hamp's nerves were shredded and it is revealed that he also had to contend with the knowledge that his wife had left him. Hamp proves to be a simple-minded but decent man who had been driven to desperate actions. His fate is revealed in the final scene.

Adam Gillen's portrayal of Hamp was



outstanding and his performance captured the terror, squalor and degradation of war.

Bob Brunsdon organised the trip and he also provided a useful and informative hand-out about Courts Martial during the Great War.

Between August 1914 and March 1920, in 286,000 courts martial, more than 20,000 servicemen were convicted of offences which carried the death sentence. In 3,080 cases (15%) the death sentence was passed and in 346 cases (1.7%) the sentence was carried out.



*The execution post at Poperinghe*

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