



CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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Welcome!

So, here we are again at one of my favourite meetings of the year when we hear short talks from our branch members. I know there is a wealth of knowledge amongst you and it is always good to hear about your family stories and the area of research that you are interested in.

We've had another excellent year with a wonderful mix of speakers thanks to Brian and Andy. If you haven't got a copy of next year's programme please pick one up before you go tonight.

Our thanks to Bob Brunsdon for yet another successful tour in September. We really appreciate all the hard work he puts into the tours to make sure they are such a success. And thanks to all of you for your continued interest and support of the branch in so many ways.

As you are aware, 2018 marks the centenary of the Royal Air Force, the formation of which is not without its own fascinating history. To mark this

anniversary, the National Archives will be holding a one-day conference entitled *There will be wings* on Friday 2 March 2018. With a keynote delivered by Professor Richard Overy (University of Exeter), the conference will be run in partnership with the RAF Museum, the National Museum of the Royal Navy, and the National Army Museum. Speakers will look at wartime aviation and how developments overtook the roles assigned to both Army and Naval aviation. Full details, and booking information can be found at www.nationalarchives.gov.uk.

Also available on that site is *First World War 100* where you can find personal stories, podcasts and a calendar of events related to the Great War.

Finally, I hope you enjoy the evening and do have a go at our Lucky Dip! I wish you and your families a very Merry Christmas and all the best for the New Year.

Peter

Future events

Tuesday, 9 January
A Prisoner at Holzminden
Ian Gumm
National Star College at 7.30pm

As a young boy Ian grew up with the stories of the daring deeds and escapes by the soldiers, sailors and airmen of the Second World War. What appears to be relatively unknown, however, are the stories relating to those captured during the First World War. Many of the Officers and men captured in the First World War, just like their counterparts some 20 or so years later, did not meekly enter captivity after they became a Prisoner of War. Many attempted to escape, some managed to make it back to their own country to rejoin the battle once again, whilst others were recaptured and returned to be unwilling guests of His Imperial Majesty Kaiser Wilhelm II. Ian's talk is about one such escape made by 29 British officers from the Holzminden Officer Prisoner of War Camp in Hanover, Germany.

Tuesday, 13 February
Monty and Rommel in the First World War
Dr Peter Caddick-Adams
National Star College at 7.30pm

The names of Field Marshals Montgomery and Rommel are familiar to us all. But what did they do in the First World War? How did they learn the trades of command and leadership? Based on his book, *Monty and Rommel: Parallel Lives*, Peter will bring these two enigmatic characters to life in terms of their 1914-18 service.

Peter has been a lecturer in Military and Security Studies at the Defence Academy, Shrivenham, since 1999. He specialises in current defence analysis, military doctrine, military history, terrorism, psychological information and military-media operations. Peter regularly broadcasts on TV and radio, and is the author of numerous books, including *By God They Can Fight*, *The Fight For Iraq* and *Monty Cassino: Ten Armies in Hell*.

Second Lieutenant Hedley Goldsmith Browne Royal Air Force

Hedley Browne was born on 15 June 1888 in Norwich, the son of John Goldsmith and Edith A Browne. His father was an insurance clerk. According to the 1901 Census the couple had three sons and one daughter and the family lived at 26 York Street, Norwich.

Prior to his military service, Hedley was a cashier with Norwich Union Life Assurance from 1905 to 1914.

His Medal Index Card shows that he joined the Army on 17 August 1914 and was a Motor Cycle Despatch Rider with the Royal Engineers (number 28090), prior to entry into the Royal Flying Corps (RFC). His CWGC Register entry records that he was on active service in France for three years from 1914.

In 1917 he transferred to the RFC and his National Archives File (AIR76/62) shows he was



declared fit as a pilot on 16 October 1917 and became a Cadet on 30 November 1917. He went on to obtain his Flying Certificate on a Maurice Farman biplane at Military School, Thetford on 25 January 1918, thereby becoming a Second Lieutenant in the RFC on 25 January 1918 (number 5886). He carried forward that rank when the RFC was absorbed into the newly formed Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918.

He was killed in a solo flying accident at Rendcomb, Gloucestershire on 8 April 1918, aged 29: he was flying a DH6 (Serial

Number C9345) with 59 Training Squadron.

He was buried in Cirencester Cemetery, where a stone cross marks his grave. Part of the inscription reads: *...who was called to 'higher service' whilst doing a solo flight near Cirencester.*

Graham Adams

Christmas letter from the Western Front

The following letter about the Christmas Truce of 1914 appeared in The Times on 2 January 1915. An officer in a Highland Regiment writes on December 28:- *You need not have pitied us on Christmas Day: I have seldom spent a more entertaining one. We were in the trenches and the Germans began to make merry on Christmas Eve, shouting at us to come out and meet them. They sang songs (very well): our men answered by singing Who were you with last night? and of course Tipperary (very badly). I was horrified at*

discovering some of our men actually had gone out, imbued more with the idea of seeing the German trenches than anything else; they met half-way and there ensued the giving of cigarettes and receiving of cigars, and they arranged (the private soldiers of one army and the private soldiers of the other) a 48 hours' armistice. Eventually both sides were induced to return to their respective trenches, but the enemy sang all night, and during my watch they played Home Sweet Home and God Save the King at 2.30am!

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