



CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

Number 170

April 2022

Welcome!

It is with great sadness that I report the passing of our branch member and friend Cyril Bleasdale last month. Cyril had been a staunch supporter of the branch since its inception and an attendee at meetings from almost the very start. Cyril was an enthusiastic and knowledgeable man who would often ask interesting questions of our speakers or bring up pertinent facts or observations. Although he had been unable to attend meetings since we restarted after the Covid lockdowns, he shall nevertheless be very much missed by all of us who enjoyed his company and our thoughts and best wishes very much go out to his family and close friends.

Hilary has reminded me that we are once again in need of articles for our branch magazine, *The Sentinel*, so please if you have anything that you can offer let Hilary or myself know - the deadline for the next issue is the middle of May.

A reminder about the mini convention Len Evans is organising for the Cotswold OMRS (Orders and Medals Research Society) group to

be held at Swindon Village Hall on Saturday 16 July. We will be represented with a display and information about the branch. Hilary will be there and would appreciate any help you can give. If you are able to help please let her know. This is an all day event. Anyone who would like to display their militaria collections, research material or who would be prepared to give a ten minute talk would be most welcome; please let Len know (levans.consulting@gmail.com).

The WFA has a new digital offering, *TrenchMapper*. This is available to non-members and members. For members the best results can be found by clicking onto the members' area of the website and then going to *TrenchMapper*. They are keen to increase the number of maps that are available, currently more than 1,000. In order to do so more help is needed. If you have a little spare time and are perhaps interested in maps (you don't have to be too computer savvy) or simply want to know more then please drop an email to: mapping@westernfrontassociation.com.

Peter

Future branch events

Tuesday, 10 May

*Fusille pour l'Exemple
The 740 French 'Shot at Dawn'*
John Reid

The Ed Shed at 7.30pm

After the shame of 1871, and the humiliating failure of Plan XVII in August 1914, the French General Staff blamed their troops. Joffre removed any form of legal safeguard or political control from the system of military justice. The result was arbitrary injustice, whereby over 477 soldiers were shot by April 1916 when political supervision was restored.



Tuesday, 14 June

Ypres: Holy Ground of the British Empire
Professor Mark Connelly
The Ed Shed at 7.30pm

Mark looks at the special place of Ypres in British commemoration 1914-1939, the feelings of pilgrims, the role of the Ypres League and the rise of an Anglo-Belgian community as ex-service IWGC gardeners married local women and started families.



Second Lieutenant Thomas Gordon Edgecombe Alder Royal Air Force

Thomas Alder was born in Gloucester on 1 May 1892, the eldest son of Emanuel Benjamin Alder and his wife Kate. The family lived at Milford Villa, 50 Hanman Road, Gloucester.

Upon leaving Ryecroft Technical School, Gloucester, in 1906, where he was a chorister (and the first member of the choir to volunteer) he was employed as a junior clerk and cashier for the Co-op Industrial Society, Gloucester and was assistant cashier at Cheltenham when war broke out.

According to his Medal Index Card (MIC) he originally served as 2987 Serjeant in the 2/5th Battalion, Gloucestershire Regiment, before being commissioned as a Second Lieutenant in the 5th Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment on 26 September 1917. He later transferred to the Royal Flying Corps and was present when that body was absorbed into the Royal Air Force on 1 April 1918.

He originally enlisted for the duration of the war, agreeing to serve overseas if required on 9 September 1914 and was posted to 2/5th Glosters. He was soon appointed a Lance Corporal (1 October 1914) and became an Acting Corporal on 30 January 1915. In December 1915 he had qualified as a First Class Instructor at the School of Musketry, Bisley. His appointment to Temporary Acting Serjeant came on 1 May 1915 and the temporary attachment was dropped on 17 July 1915 before he achieved substantive rank of Serjeant on 24 May 1916. This coincided with embarkation for France from Southampton on that date, arriving at Le Havre on the following day. On 24 August 1916 he was slightly injured when a Newton Pippin rifle grenade burst prematurely during instructional practice.

He remained in France until 2 March 1917, when he returned to the UK as a candidate to receive an Officer's Commission. He received this on 28 September 1917 and was posted to 5th Battalion, East Lancashire Regiment. Within a couple of months he had applied to join the Royal Flying Corps and on 16 November 1917 was examined as to his fitness to be a pilot. He reported to the No 1 School of Military Aeronautics, Reading on 8 December 1917, for training as a pilot. He was posted to 37 Training Depot Station, Yatesbury, Wiltshire on 6 April 1918.

The *Gloucester Journal* of 3 August 1918 throws some light on his war service. It states that he enlisted early in the war and had been promoted to Serjeant by the time he went to France in 1915 (the MIC states, correctly, this was in May 1916). He took part in the Somme offensive and was wounded and upon return to duty was recommended for a commission. It reported that he had been in training for six months when he was killed. This would place the transfer at the beginning of 1918.

The above newspaper stated that he had obtained his wings and qualified as a pilot and was expecting a posting to France when he was accidentally killed whilst flying in Hampshire (near Stockbridge) on the morning of Sunday, 28 July 1918. According to *Airmen Died in the Great War* he was serving with 3 Training Depot Station when he died and was flying a Sopwith Camel (serial number C1646). That unit was based at Lopcombe Corner aerodrome, on the Hampshire/Wiltshire border.

He was buried in Gloucester Old Cemetery, where a CWGC headstone marks his grave.

Graham Adams

(Gloucestershire War Graves Project biographical archive)

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