



CHELTENHAM & GLOUCESTER BRANCH of THE WESTERN FRONT ASSOCIATION

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Welcome!

A couple of things to remind you about in this newsletter. In the first instance the date of our AGM - Tuesday 15 November. This will be held in Cheltenham and all branch members and attendees are most welcome. All you need to do is drop me a line or have a chat and I'll pop your name down so that we can gauge numbers. It is really important for the health and survival of the branch that we have as much input from those that enjoy and benefit from its existence, so please do consider joining us. There is never any pressure on anyone to offer anything other than a viewpoint or two, but for anyone with time and interest we are still very much looking for anyone to take on treasurer or membership secretary responsibilities (although they are both currently being taken control of by Hilary Jennings and myself respectively).

The second reminder is the invitation to represent our branch at the Cenotaph on November 11. Currently we have a small

handful that will be attending, including Helen and Dave Earle who will be laying a wreath on behalf of the branch. Should you wish to join the group please let me know and perhaps a joint pooling of resources can be arranged. There is a grant being offered by the main association of £200 towards travel expenses, which I will apply for and distribute on presentation of receipts. Please do consider going if it is your sort of thing.

The CWGC is holding a *Commemorations at Christmas Carol Service* on 8 December at The Guards' Chapel, Birdcage Walk, London SW1E 6HQ. The service is from 7pm to 8.15pm and all profits will go the CWGC's charity, the Commonwealth War Graves Foundation. There is also the chance to attend an after-service reception from 8.15pm to 9.30pm with refreshments. To apply for tickets and for further information please visit the CWGC website: www.cwgc.org.
Peter

Future branch events

Tuesday, 8 November

*The Empire Strikes Back:
The Battles of Trekkopje & Gibeon 1915*
James White
The Ed Shed at 7.30pm

For most of the campaign in South West Africa the German Schutztruppe spent their time retreating but on two notable occasions they took to the offensive. With modern day battlefield photographs this is the tale of the two battles, one of which saw Rolls Royce armoured cars going into action.



Tuesday, 15 November
Cheltenham & Gloucester Branch AGM
Venue: TBC at 7.30pm

Tuesday, 13 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.

2023

Tuesday, 10 January
*The Doughboys 1917-18:
The American Experience in WWI*
Mike Sheil

Tuesday, 14 February
*Missing - Died - Survived:
The Senior brothers and the Great War*
Guy Senior

Private Charles James Brown (15879) Royal Marine Light Infantry - HMS Bulwark

Charles James Brown was born in Gloucester on 20 January 1893, one of five children born to Charles William Brown and his wife Mary Ann. His mother died in 1905 and young Charles became a domestic servant upon leaving school.

On 2 January 1911, at just short of 18 years, he enlisted in the Royal Marine Light Infantry and underwent basic training at Deal until 8 November 1911. Thereafter, he was stationed in Portsmouth before joining the ship's company of HMS *Bulwark* on 4 June 1912.

Bulwark was a 'London Class' pre-dreadnought battleship, commissioned in March 1902 and since 1910 had been in reserve in the Home Fleet. Upon the outbreak of war it became part of 5th Battle Squadron, in the reformed Channel Fleet, based at Portland: the Squadron transferred to Sheerness in Kent on 14 November 1914, when there were concerns regarding a German invasion.

On 26 November HMS *Bulwark* was moored in the Medway estuary about four miles west of Sheerness when at 7.53am a massive explosion blew the ship apart. *The Times* newspaper reported: *The band was playing and some of the men were drilling on deck when the explosion occurred. A great sheet of flame and quantities of debris shot upwards and the huge bulk of the vessel lifted and sank, shattered, torn and twisted, with officers and men aboard.*

Rescue efforts were hampered by debris and bodies strewn across the water. In all it is thought that 788 men lost their lives and there were only a handful of survivors who had by some miracle been blown clear, landing in the water and clinging to floating wreckage.



A naval court of inquiry ruled out enemy action or sabotage. On the morning of the explosion the ship's six-inch magazines were being re-stowed to keep the cordite charges together. At least thirty cordite charge packs had been left in the passage ways between the ship's magazines and when the ship's company was piped for breakfast at 7.45am, the magazine doors had been left open. Some cordite was stored against one of the boiler room bulkheads, which became increasingly warm as the boilers fired up. The cordite ignited, causing the nearby six-inch and twelve-pounder shells to detonate and the resultant fire spread to the magazines storing the shells for the twelve-inch guns, the detonation of which caused the huge explosion: examination by divers confirmed very little of the ship lay intact.

Private Charles James Brown was one of the unlucky ones to lose his life in the terrible explosion and like most of the ship's company his remains were never found and he is commemorated on the Portsmouth Naval Memorial.

Graham Adams

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