

riders and provided their own horses.

In October 1915, they embarked for Salonika in Greece, but their ship was attacked by a German submarine with the loss of 23 lives. After major repairs were carried out in Oran in North Africa, they set sail for Malta where their orders were changed and they sailed for Alexandria in Egypt. British Military Intelligence had apparently uncovered Turkish plans to attack the Suez Canal, from Sinai, while the Senussi Arabs attacked Egypt from the Western Desert.

Once in Egypt, they formed part of the Western Frontier Force, which was a mounted brigade consisting of an amazing mixture of men from the British yeomanry, the Australian Light Horse, the 15th Sikhs, the Egyptian Military Works Department, and cars from the Royal Navy Armoured Car Division and a section of the South Midland Field Ambulance. Another part of the Force included men from the New Zealand Rifle Brigade, the Bikanir Camel Corps and the Ghurka Rifles. Their role was to defend the western frontier of British-controlled Egypt against Arab and Berber tribes.

In March 1917, they invaded southern Palestine which was part of the Ottoman Empire. An attempt to capture the town of Gaza failed. In April 1917, the Lincolnshire Yeomanry, by this time part of the Anzac Mounted Division, took part in a second attempt on Gaza,

which was no more successful than the first and led to a shake up in high places and the arrival of General Allenby to take command. Fighting continued along the Gaza – Beersheba line culminating in the Third Battle of Gaza, which was fought in November 1917, and was more successful. On the heels of that victory, Allenby's forces were able to enter Jerusalem on 9th December.

However, the British had lost a total of 18,000 killed, wounded or missing and the extreme desert conditions had also taken their toll. Freezing winter nights, extreme heat in summer and the constant attacks by flies and mosquitoes, caused many of the men to fall ill. Frederick sadly was one of them, developing a type of septicaemia called pyaemia, which leads to widespread abscesses. He died in Port Said, which was an important hospital centre, on 29th December 1917 at the age of 25 and was buried in the War Memorial Cemetery there.



Port Said War Memorial Cemetery

For further copies of this leaflet or if you have any information to add, please contact Di Landon on 01452 760531

Westbury Remembers - Part 19

Edward Warren and Frederick Cook

Written by Di Landon
and sponsored by

Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council



Edward Warren and Frederick Cook both died within days of each other at Christmas 1917. They were both far from home, serving in the Middle East, but neither died as a direct result of enemy action.

Edward Warren was born in Westbury in 1896. His father, John, who was also born in Westbury, was a cattleman, and his mother, Emily, came from Wales. They lived in Boseley, at 1, Witckers Cottages. Edward had two older siblings, and by 1911 he also had a younger brother and three younger sisters. The census states that the couple had had seven children of whom six had survived, but as well as the six listed as living at home, their eldest son Ernest appears to have been living in lodgings in Newent and working as a grocer's assistant. By this time Edward was 15 and listed as a farm labourer. His older



Frederick Cook

sister was living at home and was employed as a housemaid.

Edward's service record has not survived so although we know that he enlisted in Gloucester as a private in the 3/5th Battalion of the Glosters, we do not know when. He was only 18 years old when the war broke out so if he was truthful about his age he would have been too

young to have been posted overseas for at least a year. However in June 1915, Edward's younger brother David also enlisted declaring that he was 19, but as records show that he was born in October 1898, it seems as if his enthusiasm to join his brother may have compromised his arithmetic! David had been working for Miss Jennings, a baker and grocer of Gatwick House, and she vouched for his character as well as his ability to bake a good loaf.

Edwards's battalion had been formed in 1915 and had wintered in Weston-super-Mare. They moved to Cheltenham in April 1916 and on 29th April 1916, Edward was married to Edith Baggs, a collier's daughter, at St Mary de Lode in Gloucester. The marriage certificate states that at that time he was based at Windmill Hill Camp on Salisbury Plain, but at some point after this, Edward was selected to join the Machine Gun Corps.

In 1914, the British army relied heavily on bayonets

and rifles and each battalion only had a couple of machine guns - far fewer than the Germans. In order to rectify this, the Machine Gun Corps was formed in October 1915 and eventually numbered over 170,000 men of all ranks. Line regiments were combed for the fittest and the best to meet the demand for men who could be specially trained, and in a very short time the Corps had become a model of efficiency and gained a reputation for heroism. Machine gunners accompanied the first wave of every assault and remained to cover every retirement. Their high casualty rate earned them the nickname, 'the Suicide Club'.

All Machine Gun Corps records were destroyed in a fire in 1920 and

so we only know that, having had the dubious honour of being selected to join them, Edward was with the 129th Company, whose headquarters were in Baghdad.

Following the fall of Kut-al-Amara, Major-General Maude took command of the British army in Mesopotamia. He introduced new methods, which culminated in a decisive defeat of the Turks in February 1917 and the capture of Baghdad and the Berlin-Baghdad railway in March 1917. The



British Indian Army played a significant role in this victory. After this, Maude stopped his advance because he had been denied further reinforcements, his supply lines were too long, and conditions in the summer made campaigning difficult. The temperature frequently reached 120°F (nearly 49°C) and the flies, mosquitoes and other vermin caused appalling levels of sickness and death through disease. It could take two weeks for wounded men to be shipped to the nearest hospital and 16,000 men died from disease or from their wounds, far more than were killed in action. General Maude himself died of cholera on 18 November.

Edward's record states that he

died on 26th December 1917 and so he was one of the many who died from disease. He was 22 years old and his widow, Edith, who lived in Ashfield, near Ross-on-Wye, collected his medals (the British War Medal and the Victory Medal) in 1921. He is buried in the Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery. His younger brother, David, served in France from May 1916 until the end of the war, but fortunately he survived and lived until 1979.

Frederick Willie Cook was born in Oct 1892 in Whitminster, then known as Wheatenhurst. His father, Charles, was a teacher and the 1901 census shows the family living at the School House in Longney, where his father was school master and Assistant Overseer of the Poor. In the latter role, he was responsible for collecting the local poor law rate and other administrative duties relating to poor relief, education and health. Frederick's mother, Margaret, taught sewing at Longney School, although with eight children, the youngest being Frederick and his twin sister, Eva, it is difficult to imagine how she had the time.

The school records show that

Frederick was a promising pupil, and that he was entered for the County Council Scholarship Examination in Gloucester when he was 13 years old and was appointed a monitor at Westbury. By 1907, when he was 15, he was attending



Baghdad (North Gate) War Cemetery.

Lydney Secondary School with a view to becoming a pupil teacher. Three years later he was a student teacher at Westbury, and possibly Lydney, and the records show him fixing up a

football match against Walmore Hill School in 1911 and taking the boys from Westbury School to Ballast Hole for a Nature Lesson. Later that year he left Westbury to enter Winchester Training college. Frederick's eldest sister, Margaret, also became a school teacher and by 1911 was teaching at an elementary school in Gloucester.

When the war began in 1914, Frederick enlisted in Bedford, so it seems likely that he had qualified and was teaching in that area at the time. Initially, he served in the Bedfordshire Yeomanry, but soon transferred to the 1st Battalion of the Lincolnshire Yeomanry. This was a volunteer mounted regiment, and many of its men were countrymen and farmworkers who were skilled