

sail to fight in France. After encountering German submarines as they neared the French coast, the first ship landed safely at St Nazaire and by July 3rd the entire regiment was under canvas on French soil.

Many of the men had had little training in the US and so they first went to Gondrecourt. in north eastern France for further training. Though judged to be still unprepared by French tacticians, the American Expeditionary Force (AEF) was committed to combat in the spring of 1918.

In March 1918, after nearly fifty extra German divisions arrived on the western front following the Russian surrender on the Eastern Front, the German Army launched a series of attacks, hoping to defeat the Allies before U.S. forces could be fully deployed. An offensive launched in May saw them reach the Marne River, only 59 miles from Paris.

The U.S. 2nd Division was brought up along the Paris-Metz highway and when the German forces punched a hole in the French lines, the U.S. reserve, which included George's regiment, had to conduct a 10 km forced march overnight to plug the gap in the line. German commanders ordered an advance as part of a major offensive, in which other German troops would cross the Marne River. The commander of the Marines ordered them to "hold where they stand" and they dug shallow fighting positions from which they could fight from the prone position. The Marines waited

until the Germans were within 100 yd before opening fire and mowing down waves of German infantry, forcing the survivors to retreat into the woods. The Marines were repeatedly urged to turn back by retreating French forces, but their commander uttered the now-famous retort "*Retreat? Hell, we just got here*".

Fighting continued in this area throughout June 1918 but in July the initiative passed to the Allies and the Marines were involved in the Aisne-Marne Offensive, in which their casualties included 341 officers and men. George died on 8th August 1918 and although the Index of Wills and Administration states that he was killed in action, the US Marine Muster Roll says that he died at 5.45am of acute ulcerative enteritis at the Base Hospital. It also states that he would have been awarded "Character Excellent" had he been discharged. He was buried at Oise-Aisne American 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 23 - George Rowbotham

Written by Di Landon
and sponsored by

Westbury-on-Severn Parish Council



My research into the lives of the men listed on our war memorial has come up with some surprises and none more so than the life of George V. Rowbotham. For a time I was unable to find any record of this man until I realised that there were names on the memorial that were not spelt in the same way as the military record, and I began to look under the more usual spelling of the name – *Hatherlea at Adsett*—as it looks today Rowbottom.

I could not find anyone by that name with a connection to Westbury in the UK military records, but a search of the Index of Wills and Administration came up with the following entry - "*George Victor Rowbottom of Hatherlea, Adsett, Westbury-on-Severn. A sergeant in the United States Marine Corps, died 8th August 1918 in France – killed in action. Administration Gloucester 27/6/1919 for Joseph Rowbottom, retired railwayman.*" This was clearly our man,

but it posed numerous questions about how he came to be serving with the US marines.

After much searching and thanks to the help of a member of his family through Ancestry.co.uk, I now have much more information about his family history which includes a colourful description of his great great grandmother, Sarah Edwards, as "*an itinerant hawker at local fairs*", and "*an inveterate boozier and mer-*



Hatherlea at Adsett—as it looks today

rymaker."

George Victor was born in 1887 and was baptised at St Jukes in Kensal Green. His father, Joseph, is listed as a "Railway Servant" on the census, and he and his wife already had a 3 year old son, Harry, and went on to have two more, Sidney and Kenneth. However, the 1901 census makes no mention of Harry, who would have been about 16 at that time, and the next record of him is his emigration to the USA in 1910, where he seems

to have settled in Savannah in Georgia.

As for George, we know that he attended Moberley School in Paddington but the next record I could find was in the Royal Navy Register of Seamen's Services which shows that he signed up for a "Continuous Service Engagement" of 12 years on 5th January

1905. It describes him as being 5 ft 7 ins, with auburn hair, blue eyes and a fresh complexion. He served as a stoker on a number of different ships, with mixed reports of his character between "Fair" and "Very Good", until October 1908 when the record ends with the entry "Run, Chatham" which apparently means that he deserted.

After that, his story gets a little hazy. On 19th August 1909, there is a record of a George Victor Rowbottom on a US Naturalisation document on which he signed a Declaration of Intention to "renounce forever all allegiance and fidelity to any foreign prince, potentate, state or sov-

ereignty, and particularly to Edward VII, King of Great Britain and Ireland of which I am now a subject." He states that he was born in London and his description fits, but he gives his date of birth as 10th August 1887 whereas other records indicate that he was born on 12th September 1887. The

different date of birth casts some doubt as to whether this is the right man, but it is unlikely that he would have had to prove his date of birth and, as a naval deserter, he may well have decided to alter it slightly. He states that he entered the United States from Quebec via the Canadian Pacific Railroad and

that he had arrived in Newport, Vermont the previous day and was now residing in Portland, Maine. When searching the US military records, we find a George V Rowbottom enlisting in the US Marines on 18th Nov 1910, and serving as a trumpeter, which provides another link, if a rather tenuous one, as the Naturalisation docu-

ment gives his occupation as a musician. As we have seen, George's older brother, Harry, also emigrated to the USA in 1910 and it seems that his younger brother, Sidney, joined them there in 1911. Meanwhile their parents, Joseph and Alice remained in Kensal Green with their younger brother Kenneth, who was 16 years old. I could find no record of when they moved to Westbury.

As for George, after enlisting in the Marines in 1910, he spent over 2 years travelling the world, having been based in Washington, then Cuba, then the Philippines before serving on the USS Rainbow, visiting various ports in China. He then spent the next eight months on the USS Wilming-

ton before mysteriously ending up in the US Naval Prison in Cavite in the Philippines in June 1913. I have been completely foxed by this, and cannot find out what he was supposed to have done, but he spent ten months in various naval prisons and US Disciplinary Barracks before being "restored to duty" in April 1914. After spending three months at sea on the USS West Virginia, he then seems to have been land

based for the next eighteen months. He clearly came home on occasion as he was on the SS St Paul which sailed from Liverpool to New York on 13th February 1915 and was listed as a US Citizen and a trumpeter in the Marines, who was returning from leave to his duties. In December 1915, he was promoted to Sergeant.

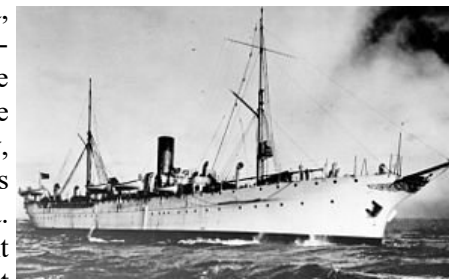
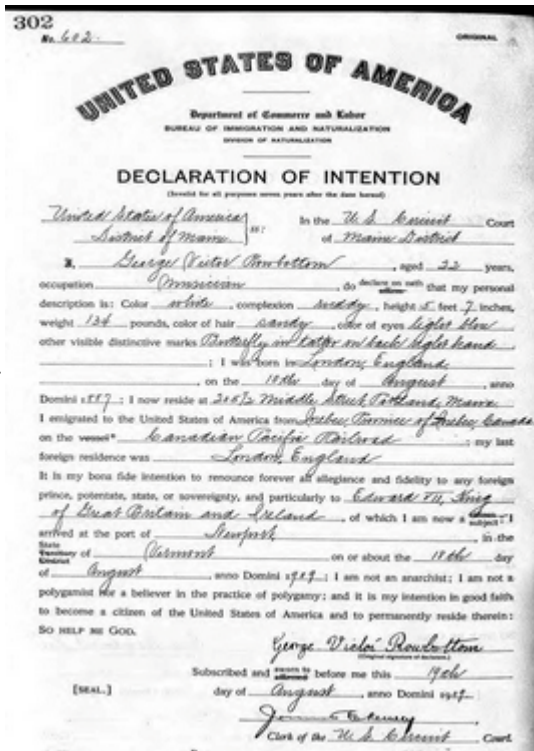
In 1914, President Wilson had adopted a position of neutrality, hoping to keep the US out of the European conflict. Strong isolationist sentiment delayed American involvement for some time but

there was a shift in public opinion following the sinking of the passenger ship Lusitania in 1915. When it was revealed that Germany

had made a secret offer to help Mexico

regain territories lost in the Mexican-American War, and German U-boats started sinking American merchant ships in the Atlantic, Americans were outraged. Wilson then asked Congress for "a war to end all wars" and Congress voted to declare war on Germany on April 6, 1917.

Just five weeks later, the 5th Regiment of the US Marines were part of the American Expeditionary Force and had 70 officers and 2,689 enlisted men (including George Rowbottom) ready to set



The USS Rainbow