

Eulogy delivered by Robert Vickery on Friday 20 July 2018 on
Captain Arthur Gilbert Walsh Church

Four months ago, in late March 1918, it appeared that Germany was on the point of winning the War on the Western Front.

On 21 March General Ludendorff launched the German offensive that was intended to bring victory on the Western Front. They were no longer fighting on two fronts as the Russians had signed the peace treaty of Brest-Litovsk on 3 March, leaving them free to switch troops to the West.

On the first day the Germans advanced more than 4 ½ miles and took 21,000 British prisoners. The attack on the British sector was unexpected and a wedge was driven between the British and French Armies. There were 8,667 British casualties that day compared with 355 on the previous day.

On the 23 March three German guns began to bombard Paris at a range of 74 miles, and British forces retreated to the Somme.

On 26 March Marshall Foch was given overall command of British and French forces and determined to hold a line in front of Amiens. A ten mile gap existed between British and French lines.

On 30 March a British, Australian and Canadian counter-attack broke the German progress, although they had advanced in places as much as forty miles.

On 4 April a renewed German attack put 15 German divisions facing seven Allied divisions, but the British, Australian and French fought back and recovered lost ground. On the following day Ludendorff called off the offensive on the Somme, but applied the effort elsewhere.

The fighting on the Western Front was dirty. On April 20 the Germans launched a massive gas bombardment of nine million rounds of gas shells. More than 8,000 British soldiers were gassed and 43 killed. Gas was employed by both sides in the War.

On 23 April an attempt was made to seal German submarines behind the mole at Zeebrugge. The Navy sent three old British cruisers to be sunk as blockships. It was a daring and risky enterprise after which eight Victoria Crosses were awarded, but the block lasted until the German Navy dredged a new channel around the obstructions.

By the end of April the Ludendorff offensive was halted and the front line stabilised, although some distance behind that of six weeks earlier.

Allied planning began to consider the campaign for 1919. By the end of May there were 650,000 American troops in France but General Pershing insisted that only one third could be used to fill ranks of British and French brigades, the remainder to wait until they could do so as an American Army.

At the end of May the Germans resumed attacks and broke through French Divisions to a depth of 12 miles in the Third Battle of Aisne. Moving on they reached the Marne and on June 1 were within forty miles of Paris. Civilians started to flee the city as they were to do again in 1940.

Meanwhile,

The 5th Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment had been sent to India in 1914 for garrison duty. In the winter of 1914/15 the battalion had to send several companies on tours through part of the Punjab to counteract anti-British propaganda and show that there were plenty of British soldiers left in India.

On 22 March 1917, 27 officers and 877 other ranks embarked at Bombay for Palestine. They reached Suez on April 4th and they went for instruction in trench warfare against the Turkish lines. They were held as a reserve force in the attack under General Allenby on the Gaza-Beesheba front. On the 20th November they were in the advance towards Jerusalem as the vanguard. On 12th March 1918 **Captain Church** led "D" Company in the move to Jerusalem, capturing Turkish prisoners and lots of equipment.

Such was the need to bolster numbers on the Western Front to replace men killed or taken prisoner that the Devons were ordered to leave Egypt and they embarked on 26 May and left in convoy for Marseilles.

As well as the Devonshires, other British and French were withdrawn from Salonika to join the Western Front Brigades.

Marshal Foch again asked General Pershing for an immediate transfer of Americans to the French sector, but was refused the numbers requested. In the end Pershing agreed 140,000 in June and a similar number in July. The Americans who went to the Marne found French troops in disarray and in retreat. 'La Guerre Finie' was the call to the Americans who arrived fresh, and made small advances against the German line which was weakening from the extended lines of supply.

By July the influenza outbreak of 1918 had spread to the battle field. More American soldiers died of influenza than were killed in action.

The Germans renewed attacks on 14 July, but some German prisoners-of-war revealed the plan to the French who prepared to repel the first barrage. General Foch launched a counter-attack on July 18 and 20,000 German prisoners and four hundred heavy guns were captured by French and American forces. In the following week the Allies advanced in Flanders and were steadily driving the Germans back. It was the beginning of the Allies final drive.

The Devonshires had been moved to the river Aisne to support the chase back from the valley of the Marne, but on 19 July they were moved by train for an attack on two German

strong points at Marfaux and Cuitron a few miles south-west of Reims. The valley of the river Ardre at this point was defined by steep hills on either side.

The attack began at 8.10am on 20 July but casualties were heavy: the 5th Devons had two officers and 34 men killed, among them was **Captain Church**, a “splendid company commander and a pre-war officer of the battalion.”

Arthur Gilbert Walsh Church was born 13 July 1894, in Darjeeling, India.

His grandfather, Frederick Church, married Emma Walsh whose family had been settled at Bridge House, Dawlish, since 1829.

Grandparents Frederick and Emma Church were settled in 6 Barton Terrace in 1861 with

Theobald son (1855-) born in Starcross

Arabella A dau (1853-) Dawlish

Frederick S son (1857- 1904) “

Charles T W son (1860-1937)

There is a tablet on the west wall of St Gregory's Church to

“Frederick Stephen Church, Second Son of Frederick Church, R.N., and Emma his wife.

Born 18 Dec 1857 Died 12 Feb 1904

Charles Theobald Walsh Church, our subject's father, entered the army in the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Sussex Regiment and was stationed in India, where he married Gertrude Rose Birch (1861-1894) who had been born in Murree, Bengal. They married in 1890 in the Punjab while he was stationed at Jalapahar, Darjeeling.

Their first son, Edward Theobald Walsh Church, was born in Darjeeling, in 1892 and entered the Royal Navy, following his grandfather. By 1911, at the age of 19, he was a Midshipman serving aboard H.M.S. INDEFATIGABLE. He left the ship before the battle of Jutland when she was hit and destroyed in a massive explosion. He was lucky to retire with the rank of Commander, R.N., and died in Bridgewater, Somerset on 3 March 1948.

Their second son **Arthur Gilbert Walsh Church** was born also in Darjeeling, in 1894. His mother, Gertrude, died there in the same year but it is not known if the two events were connected.

After the death of his first wife, Charles T W Church returned to Britain and married Emily Blanche Jackson in the Newton Abbot district in December 1899. Their grave is only a short distance from the Cemetery Chapel.

Emily Blanche Jackson was one of eight daughters and two sons of George William Collins Jackson and Catherine Price Lewis and an aunt to Lieutenant Wilfred George Jackson (1895-1915). The Jackson family came to live in the Manor House,

Dawlish, ca 1885. They stayed until the death of a sister, Katherine Anne Jackson, at the age of 74 in 1929.

Charles and Emily Church had two children from their marriage, Arabella Bathia M Church and Theobald Frederick Stephen Church. They lived first in Lancashire and by 1901 Emily B Church was living with her step-sons Edward, **Arthur**, and her daughter Arabella in Piermont Place, Dawlish. Charles was absent. Their first son, Theobald Frederick Stephen Church also joined the Royal Sussex Regiment and his name is added to



his parents' headstone opposite the Cemetery Chapel. There is no reference to the father's first children by Gertrude Birch. One even has the sense that the second marriage distanced Charles from his first two sons.

In 1911 they were living on West Cliff and Charles was with the household again, having retired as a Major from the Royal Sussex Regiment.

Arthur Gilbert Walsh Church was sent away in 1908 at the age of 14 to board at Charterhouse school, Godalming, Surrey. Whilst at Charterhouse he joined the Rifle Corps, reaching the rank of Sergeant, represented his House at Rackets and was a keen member of the Debating Society. He was appointed as School Monitor and left with a School Exhibition to Hertford College, Oxford. He left Charterhouse in July 1913 and sought a commission in the 5th (Prince of Wales' own) Battalion of the Devonshire Regiment. He was awarded a commission as a 2nd Lieutenant on the 10th November 1913. His application shows him to be unusually tall at 6 ft 2 ½ ins. His headmaster, Frank Fletcher, subscribed to his good moral character in a reference dated 25 October 1913.

He died, aged 24 on 20 July 1918 and is buried in Marfaux British Cemetery on the Marne, France.