

SHOEING-SMITH WALTER WILLIAM PITTMAN

11643, 147th Royal Field Artillery Regiment

Died aged 30 on 17 April 1915

Remembered with honour at *Helles Memorial, Turkey*; Panel 21 & 22

Commemorated in Tewkesbury at the Cross and in the Abbey



Helles Memorial, Turkey



W.W. Pittman [Graphic 1/5/1915]



Royal Field Artillery Regiment

WALTER WILLIAM PITTMAN (the *Graphic* erred with initials and surname) was born in Tewkesbury in 1885 to William Pittman from Tewkesbury and Julia Annie (formerly Wilkins) from Fiddington. William worked as a hay-trusser, the family living at various times in Well Alley, Scotts Court and Post Office Alley. In 1901, aged 16, Walter was working as a shoeing smith, an occupation which he continued not only in civilian life but also in the army. In 1906 Walter married Edith Amelia Chandler from Stonehouse, and they had three children. In 1911 the family was living at 1 Castle Villas, Lower Quay Street, Gloucester.

Walter enlisted at Gloucester in the Royal Field Artillery, initially as a gunner, although later described as a shoeing-smith, his occupation in civilian life. It is clear from his surviving official records that this was considered a rank in its own right. Walter was posted to the 29th Division, and was serving in the Ammunition Column at the time he died. The 29th was the last regular division to be created, formed in Warwickshire in early 1915 from regular infantry battalions recalled home from garrisons across the British Empire. The division was originally intended for France but was diverted to Gallipoli by Kitchener, who was under pressure to launch a ground attack on the peninsula. Walter's medal records confirm that he disembarked in Egypt, en route to Gallipoli, on 1 April 1915.

However, Walter never arrived, as he was drowned in the Aegean Sea on 17 April 1915 when his transport ship, *SS Manitou*, a former transatlantic liner, was attacked by the Turkish torpedo boat *Demir Hissar*. *'The attack does not seem to have been very well carried out, for both of the torpedoes fired missed ... The rest of the division safely reached shore: the only unit to suffer loss being the 147th Brigade RFA as the result of a sensational incident. The guns were stowed in the hold, and the small ammunition was in the magazine. So great was the confidence that the seas had been swept of hostile craft other than submarines ... that no preparations had been made to meet an attack.'* After the torpedo had been fired, boats on the *Manitou* had been lowered *'and men were going over the side in large numbers. In one case the davits were strained to breaking point, and with a crash the occupants of the boat were hurled into the sea ... What might have been the destruction of an entire brigade of artillery resulted in a regrettable but comparatively small number of casualties by drowning and bruises.'*

Shoeing-Smith Walter William Pittman was one of those *'regrettable casualties'*. As his body was not recovered, he is commemorated by name on the *Helles Memorial* on the Gallipoli peninsula in Turkey. Walter was awarded the *'1914-1915 Star'* medal. His youngest brother, Arthur, survived being gassed during the final advance in October 1918.