

John Frederick Bunce MC

Sub-Lieutenant, Royal Navy Volunteer Reserve, 63rd Royal Naval Division

John Frederick Bunce is unusual both in that he served in the Navy and also won the Military Cross. He was born on 5 January 1888 and baptised on 3 February in the church of St Mary of Charity, Faversham, the son of James and Kate Bunce. A second son, Edward Herbert, was born in the period October to December 1889, but when the boys were aged only 3 and one, their mother died. In the 1891 Census the family was living at 51 Newton Road, Faversham. James was working as a brewery accountant and was a widower.

By the time of the 1901 Census John and his younger brother, Edward Herbert, were boarding at Herne Bay College while their father remained in Faversham, but at 9 South Road, Albion Terrace. Both his sons would go on to become bank clerks. In 1911 Edward Herbert Bunce was working at Grimsbury, near Banbury, Oxfordshire, and James Bunce had risen to become chief accountant.

John came to work at the Capital and Counties Bank in Amersham, and his address was given on the Medal card as Arundel House [141 High Street, Old Amersham]. He left the bank to join the forces in December 1914 and by January 1915 had been accepted into the Public Schools Battalion of the Territorial Force. However, in May 1915 he was a member of D Company, Hawke Battalion, of the Royal Naval Division, and was stationed at Blandford.¹ The Navy had traditionally expected its sailors to fight on land when necessary and once the Navy's ships were fully crewed and the desperate need for more infantry became apparent, reservists, both seamen and Royal Marines, were formed into the 63rd (Royal Naval) Division to fight alongside the army. The Navy, however, retained its own traditions and terminology, to the bafflement and annoyance of some army officers.

John Bunce, who had grown up close to the sea and who probably, as a public schoolboy, would have undergone some military training, may have been well suited to this hybrid role. He was wounded in the Dardanelles campaign on 22 July 1915. He came up through the ranks of Ordinary Seaman, Able Seaman, Leading Seaman (19 Sept 1915) and became a Petty Officer on 8 November 1915.



“Arundel House” 141 High Street Amersham was the home of John Frederick Bunce when he worked at the Capital and Counties Bank, Amersham in 1914, prior to enlisting.
(Photographed in August 2014, by H. Garas)

¹ Details of his service may be found at The National Archives, Kew, in ADM 339/1, ADM 339/3 and ADM 242/0002. Bunce was a tall man (5'11”), with brown hair and grey eyes. His original number, issued in London, was Z/1146.

On 18 May 1916 he went on board the troopship *Franconia* and arrived in Marseilles five days later. In early July 1916 he was hospitalised² in France with inflammation of the larynx. In October, following a spell of leave in England, he proceeded to Cadet School.

On 1 Jan 1917 John was appointed Temporary Sub-Lieutenant and posted to Howe Battalion serving with the British Expeditionary Force (BEF). It was standard practice to transfer newly promoted officers so that they did not have to command ratings they had served alongside.

He did not have long to savour this promotion for on 17 Feb 1917 he suffered a gunshot wound to the chest and was taken to the 45th (1st South Midland) Casualty Clearing Station where he died two days later. He was buried in the Dernancourt Communal Cemetery Extension. Dernancourt lies about 3km south of Albert, in the area of the Somme.

The circumstances in which he came by his wound are recorded in the *London Gazette* of 26th March 1917 (p 2982, col B) in the citation accompanying the award of the Military Cross: 'For conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He carried out a dangerous reconnaissance and obtained most valuable information. He has on many occasions carried out most valuable work.'

The medal was presented to his father James Bunce of Windermere, West Cliff, Whitstable, in a ceremony reported in the *Bucks Examiner* of 13 July 1917 and summarised below. The reporter also pointed out that Brigadier-General Cavendish had connections with Chesham. The Brigadier stated that he was quite sure that Sub-Lieutenant Bunce's name would be cherished and handed down to future generations as an example of a most gallant Englishman.

The Late Sub-Lieut J. F. Bunce

Presentation of the Military Cross to his father.

A very interesting military ceremony took place at Whitstable, Kent on Wednesday, when the posthumous award of the Military Cross was made to Sub-Lieut John Frederick Bunce, RNVR, Howe Brigade, Royal Navy Division who died on February 19th from wounds received whilst gallantly leading his men two days earlier.

The troops stationed in the town were paraded at Westmeads, and in the presence of a large crowd of townspeople the presentation was made by Brigadier-General the Hon W.E.Cavendish MVO who visited Whitstable for the purpose.

In a square formed by the troops were assembled Mr Bunce, Mr A W Daniels, JP, (Chairman of the local UDC), the vicar of Whitstable Rev Hyla Holden, Dr Hayward, Mr H L Daly and Mr H Pover. Addressing Mr Bunce, Brigadier-Gen Cavendish said: "Mr Bunce, I am commanded by His Majesty the King to present this Military Cross, which was awarded to your late son, to you. This Military Cross was awarded to the deceased officer for conspicuous gallantry and devotion to duty. He had on many occasions carried out dangerous reconnaissance and obtained most valuable information. The duty I have before me today is of a twofold nature, sorrow and pride. Sorrow in that I extend my deepest sympathy to you on the great loss of your son and I, with the rest of England, mourn the loss of a gallant officer. Pride and admiration for the way in which this officer carried out his duties to King and country, he has been a noble example to everyone. It is to such men as your son that we owe the traditions of our race and Whitstable may well be proud of such a citizen."

At the conclusion of the proceedings, Col. Woodhouse DSO said; "In memory of this gallant officer, we will present arms." The battalion presented arms and the band of the 11th Somerset Light Infantry played the National Anthem.

John Frederick Bunce also received The Allied Victory Medal, The British War Medal, 1914-1919 and The 1914-1915 Star.

² It is noted that he was admitted via the 2nd Field Ambulance RND to the 6th and 23rd Casualty Clearing Stations, rejoining his unit about two weeks later.

John Frederick Bunce is remembered with Honour in the
Dernancourt Communal Cemetery Extension, Somme, France
(grave ref. VC 29)

He is commemorated also on a memorial tablet inside Little Missenden Church and on the war
memorial in Oxford Street, Whitstable.



Military Cross

A plain Greek cross with splayed ends to the arms, each of which bears the imperial crown. The obverse centre bears the monogram of the serving monarch. The medal is made of silver. The Military Cross with the cipher of George V was awarded in the First World War to Warrant officers and officers below the rank of Major. The MC was also granted to Royal Marine officers and a few were given to the Navy (as in the case of John Frederick Bunce) and to Air Force officers.

The MC is a third level military decoration awarded "*in recognition of an act or acts of exemplary gallantry during active operations against the enemy on land*".

Since 1993, it could be awarded to any member of our Armed Services and, since 1979, it could also be awarded posthumously.

(Reference: Peter Duckers "*British Gallantry Awards 1855 to 2000*". Shire Books 2001 and Wikipedia)