

Augustin François Marie Vitel

It is well known that the outbreak of the Great War saw many of the French workers on Jersey's farms and elsewhere called back to their country for compulsory military Service. In Augustin Vitel's case, he had been working at the Somerville Hotel at Havre des Pas as the Chef. From Jersey he headed to Lannion, which was a minor French Naval Base while his Livre Militaire was numbered 6340.



Augustin was born in Plerin, Cotes du Nord on the 11th October, 1882, but a few years later, the Vitel family moved back to their home village of Ploubazlanec, near Paimpol. Beginning in 1905, Jersey Immigration Records list his arrival to work as a Chef, at various Jersey hotels during the summer months, returning to Ploubazlanec at the end of each September, and then coming back to Jersey each April, and always living in the same house, 2, Albany Villas, Great Union Road, St. Helier, a property that he may have owned. After the war, he returned to the Island to settle and would die on the 12th September, 1960.

As the accompanying picture of him in later years show, he had been awarded the following medals:

- Knight's Badge of the Ordre du Mèrite Social.*
- Croix de Guerre 1914-18,
- Croix du Combattant Voluntaire,
- Medaille Commemoratif de la Grande Guerre,
- Medaille Interallié de la Victoire, and a number of the
- French Republic's Ministry of The Interior's Silver Medals for 'Saving life at Sea'

*This Order has two Ranks. Knight with 5 years qualifying service and then promotion to Officier following a further 8 years service.



Unfortunately, his descendants are unaware of the background as to why the Croix de Guerre and the Silver Medals for 'Saving life at Sea' were awarded, and put this down to either that the account was completely forgotten about or that the current generation were never told about it. But there is possibly a clue in that he was at Lannion which, according to Ouest-France's '*Ouest dans la Grande Guerre*', was part of the defensive chain around the north west of France, and also home to four chasseurs (or submarine hunters) and two vedettes (or patrol boats), as well as being a command centre for aircraft operations, all of this for dealing with the U-boat threat.

Back in Jersey he would eventually become the President of the Jersey Branch of '*Les Ancien Combattants Francais de la Grande Guerre*', and in this capacity would be introduced to another well-known Great War veteran in the late 1940s as can be seen below.



His Funeral Mass in 1960 was held at St. Thomas RC Church and was a notable affair, attended by the Bailiff, the Lieutenant-Governor, and the French Consul, while a Guard of Honour was provided by *Les Ancien Combattants*.