

## Charles Albert Knee

### “My Army Experience”

Many of us now wearing the khaki uniform are realising for the first time the thrills of “Book Romance” which in our boyhood filled us with such delightful imaginations and little did we dream that we should actually figure in those tales of daring and excitement glorified by the heroes in the books we loved.

So here am I, one of the rank and file of the vast khaki clad army, anxious to do my “bit” and in a few lines endeavour to pen my own experience since I answered the national call thirty three months ago.

At the outbreak of war I was pleased to offer my services, one, amongst the thousands of enthusiastic volunteers from the office, the works and the plough. I naturally chose my own County Regiment of Yeomanry together with my friends and am sure a merrier crowd was impossible to find. Great excitement prevailed the day of our entrainment for camp and still greater the excitement the day the uniform was donned.

At first the various drill movements seemed more or less like my first lesson in Euclid, rather complicated; and continual repetition was naturally very monotonous, and it was after this stage the most essential factor in the training of a soldier was instilled in my mind, namely discipline, which I soon found that to attain the standard of efficiency, one must possess this quality. From the earliest history of the world a well disciplined Army has always proved unconquerable and many centuries ago one reads how a small well disciplined Greek Army defeated a rabble Persian Army more than ten times its size. The same applies today; the Great British Empire has been founded by the immortal deeds of quite small Armies of which discipline has been its chief characteristic.

As my confidence as a rider improved the training became much more interesting and many field days were enjoyed and proved very instructive. Many privileges were granted by my Officers, who believed in the old saying, "all work and no play makes Jack a dull boy", and many happy days were spent in the hunting field where good sport was obtained besides good training. Visual training, judging distance and physical training sadly neglected in my every day life was very interesting and greatly improved me mentally and physically. Busy days were many, especially when my regiment moved from one camp to another, sometime by train and sometime by road. One of the most interesting experiences was a weeks scheme which brought my Regiment from Canterbury to Maresfield Park in 1915. And many useful points in reconnaissance and outposts were obtained.

Later on my duties were confined to the Orderly Room where I gained some knowledge of Military Laws &c. Great disappointment reigned when our horses were taken away, and the Regiment was made a Yeomanry Cyclist Regiment; neither Cavalry nor Infantry. After over two years of a somewhat varied career the Army Council decided to make the Yeomanry Regiments a more effective branch of the service, and a great honour was conveyed by transferring them to the Machine Gun Corps Cavalry. I was fortunate enough to be amongst the ones so favoured and never regret the day of my transfer.

My course of Machine Gun Instruction was most interesting and instructive. The Machine Gun is probably the most interesting of all weapons and properly handled makes it the most formidable.

Up till the present time in my training my training has been confined to England and am now looking forward to my first experience of actual warfare and should I be fortunate enough to survive the lessons learnt in my army experience will be a great advent in my every day life. There are doubtless great discomforts and hardships yet to be faced, but these are mere trifles when they are shared by the splendid comrades of fond memories.

*C A Knee*  
Corporal  
No. 101723 'D' Squadron  
Machine Gun Corps (Cavalry).

Maresfield Park  
10th June 1917.”

*(Transcription of a letter sent to his family - with thanks to Stan Knee - his nephew; for allowing me to reproduce it).*

**Charles Albert Knee** was born in Melksham, 18th October, 1888, eldest son of Albert John and Mary Annie Knee. His father Albert was a sign-writer and the business was in Union Street, Melksham. The 1901 Census records Charles having one brother and five sisters, Gertrude Alice Knee (born 1888); Gladys Edith Knee (born 1891); Stanley George Knee (born 1894); Margaret Caroline Knee (born 1896); Dorothy Kate Knee (born 1898); and Ella Mary Knee (born 1900). The 1911 census shows the Knee family still living at 6, Union Street with one addition to the family, John Cecil Knee (born 1903). Charles by then is 22 years old, single and working as a clerk and his younger brother Stanley is 17 years old, also single and working as a Cycle Makers Assistant for Mr. F. Venton.



St. Michael's Church Football Team 1908-09  
Charles Knee (bottom right).

**The London Gazette** 13th February 1918, Supplement: 30524, Page: 2021.

This supplement from the War Office listed Cadets from regular forces to become temporary 2nd Lieutenants. Charles Albert Knee was listed under the Machine Gun Corps (Infantry) 26th January, 1918.

**UK Army List 1918** lists Charles Albert Knee, Machine Gun Corps, as 2nd Lieutenant Temporary and 2nd Lieutenant with Seniority date of 26th January, 1918.

### MEDAL INDEX CARD

Campaign :- Medals		(A) Where decoration was earned.		First on which mentioned in roll		
		(B) Present situation.		MEDAL	ROLL	PAGE
(A) Knee	Machine Gun Corps	2nd Lt		VICTORY	off 224	4 <sup>E</sup>
(B) Charles Albert	Machine Gun Corps	2nd Lt		BRITISH		
Action taken				STAR		
Indigible for T.F. War Medal. Anti Min 14, no 16/734.						
Theatre of War France.						
Disemb. Date 14.6.18. NW/61434.						
<small>(G 24 46) W214-HP259 500,000 4/19 HWV(P240) K608 [OVER]</small>						
Correspondence.						
Lieut. Chas. A. Knee, applies for B.W. Medal 5-1-20.						
Reply on 8.3.9. from S. A. Knee. Esq. 13-1-20.						
Notifies change of address + also applies for T.F. medal. Min. 7. NW/61734.						
Address: Ivanhoe * 20 North Rd.						
New address: Melksham St Andrews						
The Bungalow, Wilts. Bristol						
Archib Road						
Colne Wilts 4-2-20						

## THE MACHINE GUN CORPS - 1915 to 1922



The Machine Gun Corps (MGC) was a corps of the British Army, formed in October 1915 in response to the need for more effective use of machine guns on the Western Front in World War I. The Heavy Branch of the MGC was the first to use tanks in combat, and the branch was subsequently turned into the Tank Corps, later called the Royal Tank Regiment. The MGC was disbanded in 1922.

At the outbreak of World War I in August 1914 the tactical potential of machine guns was not appreciated by the British Military. The Army therefore went to war with each infantry battalion and cavalry regiment containing a machine gun section of just two guns each. This was supplemented in November 1914 by the formation of the Motor Machine Gun Service (MMGS), administered by the Royal Artillery, consisting of motor cycle mounted machine gun batteries. A machine gun school was also opened in France.

A year of warfare on the Western Front proved that, to be fully effective, machine guns must be used in larger units and crewed by specially trained men. To achieve this, the Machine Gun Corps was formed in October 1915 with Infantry, Cavalry and Motor branches, followed in 1916 by the Heavy Branch. A depot and training centre was established at Belton Park in Grantham, Lincolnshire, and a base depôt at Camiers in France.

The Infantry Branch was by far the largest and was formed initially by the transfer of battalion machine gun sections to the MGC, these being grouped into Brigade Machine Gun Companies, three per division. New companies were raised at Grantham. In 1917 a fourth company was added to each division. In February and March 1918, the four companies in each division were formed into a Machine Gun Battalion.

The Cavalry Branch consisted of Machine Gun Squadrons, one per cavalry brigade. A Cavalry MG Training Centre was formed at Maresfield Park, Uckfield, Sussex on October 1916.

The Motor Branch, after absorbing the MMGS, formed several types of units: motor cycle batteries, light armoured motor batteries (LAMB) and light car patrols. As well as motor cycles, other vehicles used included Rolls-Royce and Ford Model T cars.

The Heavy Section was formed in March 1916, becoming the Heavy Branch in November of that year. Men of this branch crewed the first tanks in action at Flers, during the Battle of the Somme in September 1916. In July 1917 the Heavy Branch separated from the MGC to become the Tank Corps, later called the Royal Tank Regiment.

The MGC saw action in all the main theatres of war, including France, Belgium, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Salonika, East Africa and Italy. In its short history the MGC gained an enviable record for heroism as a front line fighting force. Indeed, in the latter part of the war, as tactics changed to defence in depth, it commonly served well in advance of the front line. It had a less enviable record for its casualty rate. Some 170,500 officers and men served in the MGC with 62,049 becoming casualties, including 12,498 killed, earning it the nickname 'the Suicide Club'.

At the end of hostilities the MGC was again re-organised in a smaller form as many of its soldiers returned to civilian life. However, the Corps continued to see active service in subsequent wars: the Russian Civil War, the Third Anglo-Afghan War, and in the Northwest Frontier of India. It also served prominently in the British army which occupied parts of Germany in the period between the 1918 Armistice and the Versailles Peace Treaty. Its equipment and training made it possible for a relatively small garrison to control a large population.

By 1920 the headquarters in Belton Park was closed and the War Office was seeking to dispose of the many buildings. The Corps was disbanded in 1922 as a cost-cutting measure.