

HARRY TORDOFF WOODHEAD



14th January 1920

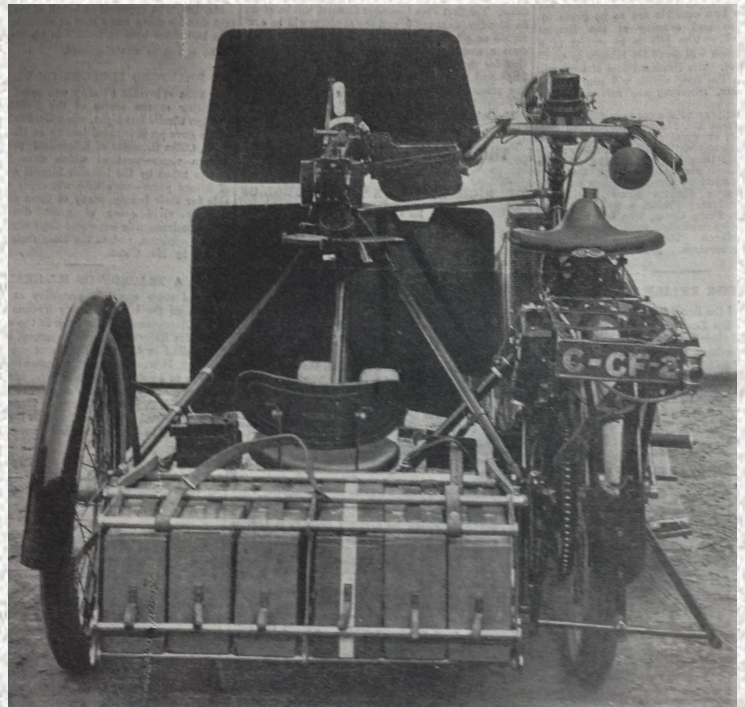
1887-1920 Aged 32

Captain Motor Machine Gun Corps, attached Royal Flying Corps and Royal Air Force.

Harry Woodhead was born on 23rd November 1887 at Low Moor, to the south of Bradford. His father Alfred worked for the Low Moor Colliery, of which he would follow in the footsteps of his own father Ezra as manager. His mother was Ada Tordoff, was also from Low Moor. Her father Joseph worked in the iron industry as a forgerman, at Low Moor and later at Armley (Leeds). Prior to her marriage she trained as a teacher. Alfred and Ada had only two children: Harry, and a younger sister, Ida.

Harry started at Bradford Grammar School in 1899, shortly before he was twelve, and was a pupil on the Modern side for four years. His class positions at the end of each year suggest that Chemistry and Physics were his favoured subjects, and when he left school in 1903, aged sixteen, he worked under his father at the Low Moor Company. When he was nineteen he joined the Yeomanry, the mounted arm of the Territorial Force; his subsequent war service may suggest that he was an enthusiast for motor-cycles and he may have belonged to a club. He also joined Bradford Rifle Club which was established in 1908. At the time war began in 1914 he was still living with his parents at Wesley Place, Low Moor, as a lodger.

When the war began Harry will have been embodied with the Yeomanry, probably the Yorkshire Hussars; however, by the time he went to France on 21st July 1915 he had transferred to the Motor Machine Gun Service. Although part of the RFA, the MMGS was equipped with motor-cycle sidecar combinations which each carried a Vickers machine-gun. Initially, at least, the Scott Company of Bradford supplied machines (see photo), although they were soon found to be inadequate for active service. Once the Western Front settled into immobility at the end of 1914, the MMGS operated as dismounted machine-gun sections. Harry went to the front as a temporary Lieutenant with the temporary rank of Captain. A few months later the service was incorporated into the newly-created Machine Gun Corps (as 'MGC Motors').



How long Harry served in France is not known, but in September 1916 his appointment as Assistant Instructor in Gunnery at the MGC Training Centre at home was published. On the last day of December 1916 he was attached to the Royal Flying Corps, although not as a pilot. For most of 1917 he served as the Machine Gun Officer to 2nd Brigade in France. At the start of 1918 he was posted to the Armament School at Uxbridge, Middlesex, then became Gunnery Instructor to the 8th Wing. Shortly after this the RFC became the RAF.

In August 1918 Harry became ill and entered the Central RAF Hospital. Although he was discharged after a few weeks, he was transferred to the Non Effective Pool and attached to 8th Wing HQ. In March 1919 he relinquished his commission 'on account of ill-health'. He returned to his parents' house where he died on 14th January 1920. The cause of his death was certified as Hodgkins Disease from which he had suffered for twelve months. His family believed it had been caused by his war service. They dedicated a window to his memory in Holy Trinity Church, Low Moor, which includes the text: 'in proud and ever loving memory of Harry Tordoff Woodhead, Captain Royal Air Force, who served, suffered, and died ... as a result of the Great War.' It also stated that he was 'disabled in the Great War'. He was buried in the graveyard of Holy Trinity Church, Low Moor.



Acknowledgements:

There is no photo of Harry Woodhead in the School memorial book—this picture of a Scott motor machine gun carrier is from *The Yorkshire Observer* of 5th December 1914 (author's photo). The family was researched using Ancestry.co.uk. Harry's years at B.G.S. are recorded in the Annual Reports for 1900 to 1903. The details of his military service before and after 1914 re taken from British Royal Air Force, Officers Service Records 1912-1920, accessed through Findmypast.co.uk. The date of entry into France is from the Medal Index Card. Reports of various promotions and appointments are from newspaper reports accessed through Findmypast. For his burial and the window in Holy Trinity Church, <<https://www.gravestonephotos.com/public/namedetails.php?grave=433203&forenames=Harry%20Tordoff&surname=Woodhead>> accessed 1.1.2020.

For the Motor Machine Gun Service, see <<https://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/machine-gun-corps-in-the-first-world-war/motor-machine-guns-of-the-first-world-war/>>. The date of his entry into France suggests Harry served with 12th Motor Machine Gun Battery.

This biography was researched and composed by Nick Hooper in December 2019 and January 2020.

For further information, contact Nhooper1956@googlemail.com, or see <<http://www.bradfordgrammar.com/former-pupils/bradford-grammar-school-in-ww1/>>.