

William George Webb (A92)

William George Webb was born in Waltham, Kent on 27 February 1881. He joined the army on 14 February 1900, serving in the 1st (King's) Dragoon Guards (KDG). He fought in South Africa during the second Boer War in 1901/02, fighting in the Cape Colony and Orange Free State. He was back in Chatham in 1906 when he married Ada Mitchell at the parish church on 14 July. At the time he was a Corporal and the regiment was based in Hounslow, London.

By August 1908 the KDG were in Punjab, India. The regiment was part of the 8th (Lucknow) Cavalry Brigade. Ada accompanied William to India and two of their four children were born there.

When the First World War started William was still in India with the KDG. The Lucknow brigade arrived in France on 11 November 1914 with the Indian Expeditionary Force. William was, by that time, a Sergeant in the regiment's Maxim Machine Gun section. He was awarded the Military Medal (MM) for gallantry at Hooge Chateau (near Ypres in Belgium) in June 1915 (London Gazette 27 October 1916) when the regiment was involved in fierce close quarter fighting as the Germans attempted to break through the thin British line.

In October 1915 the British army created the Machine Gun Corps (MGC). At the end of January 1916 the machine gun sections of the three regiments in the Lucknow Brigade were detached from their respective regiments and amalgamated to form the Lucknow Machine Gun Squadron (cavalry had squadrons, infantry had companies). As he was part of the machine gun section William was transferred to the MGC. As the Squadron Sergeant Major (SSM) William was awarded the Military Cross (MC). His citation appeared in the London Gazette on 13 February 1917 and read, "awarded for conspicuous gallantry in action. He commanded his section with great skill for fifteen days. On two occasions he carried messages across the open under very heavy fire". This action took place in November 1916 in the trenches just outside the village of Hebuterne which is in the Northern Somme region of France (the battle of the Somme started on 1 July 1916 and continued until mid-November 1916). After continued gas attacks and heavy shelling with high explosive and shrapnel rounds William was left to command the two Vickers Machine Guns of 5 section when the section was left without an officer and there were no others to replace him.

Conditions were horrendous as the trenches were constantly flooded and collapsing from the relentless German artillery bombardment. The squadron spent a continuous period of 25 days in the trenches during October/November 1916 and the six machine gun sections of the squadron were in constant action providing support to the infantry and firing at laid German targets. William received his medal in June 1917 and continued to serve in France until 14 August 1917. The Lucknow Brigade returned to India in October 1917.

In 1919 the KDG were involved in the third Afghanistan war and saw action in the Khyber Pass. On 16 May the KDG made the last recorded horsed cavalry charge by a British regiment. William retired from the army as the Acting Regimental Sergeant Major (RSM) on 18 March 1922 with nine medals and an exemplary character assessment. He relocated to Doncaster with Ada and their children only to re-enlist in the Territorial Army in 1923, serving in the Queens Own Yorkshire Dragoons until 1927. Ada gave birth to a fourth child in Doncaster, a daughter named Joan who was born in November 1924. William Webb MC MM died on 10 July 1934, aged 53, after suffering from TB. He died at the family home at 149 Carr House Road.

Medals - Military Cross, Military Medal, Queens South Africa Medal with Cape Colony Clasp and Orange Free State Clasp, Austrian Diamond Jubilee Medal, Coronation Durbar Medal, 1914 Star, British War Medal, Victory Medal, Long Service and Good Conduct Medal.