



## Arthur ARMER

2nd Lieutenant, 11th Border Regiment (Lonsdale)



Arthur Armer's war service charts a very diverse and colourful career, incorporating a rise through the ranks, and service in various theatres of war. His death, however, reinforces the grim reality of the First World War.

In September 1917, Armer was attached as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant to the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion Border Regiment. This unit was training in the region of Coxyde, at a village called Oost Dunkerque (located on the diagonal between Ypres and Dunkirk). On the first of the month the tone was set when the village was subject to an artillery onslaught from "long distance high velocity guns." On the 4<sup>th</sup> September the Regiment was rotated into the front line. The trenches they occupied were in a poor state of repair, and enemy shelling was a continuing threat. The war diary for the 6<sup>th</sup> September 1917 reveals in stark detail what happened to Armer.

"Some "Minnies" [Minenwefer] troublesome on the Left Company Front, 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt A Armer killed and 3 O.R.s wounded"

The Germans had been active in evolving efficient trench warfare weapons, and by September 1917 the Minenwerfer (Mine thrower) was a deadly addition to their arsenal. It was a mortar designed to rain high explosive, gas or smoke shells on the allied trenches. As Lt Armer was about to enter his dugout in the front line one such shell exploded close by, and he was struck on the head and killed outright. He was not involved in any huge offensive, nor any elite operation, he was merely engaged in a mundane trench rotation. In fact the war diary for virtually the entire period describes the area as "Fairly quiet." His death, however, reveals the reality of the war. Death was literally rained down on men, and it was artillery above any other determinant that was the biggest killer.

Arthur Armer's life, however, was far more dynamic than his death. Born on the 28<sup>th</sup> February 1894, he had attended Queen Elizabeth Grammar School for only a short period of time in 1908. In August 1914, Armer was a solicitor's clerk and also a member of the local territorial unit, the 4<sup>th</sup> Border Regiment. His 'soldiering' had in fact even earlier foundations, with him serving in the Cadet Corps before becoming a territorial soldier. Upon outbreak of hostilities Armer was thus 'called-up' for service and began training with the 1<sup>st</sup>/4<sup>th</sup> Border Regiment (Territorials). Many other local men, including 'old-boys' from QES, such as Herbert Hartley and Percival Harrison, were also Territorials in the same regiment, and commenced training. By the end of 1914 the 4<sup>th</sup> Borders were 'in theatre' on active service. However, they were not in France or Flanders, but were in fact in India, engaged in policing the British Empire. Native elements were described as troublesome, and even India regiments could prove challenging to handle, with the British Army stretched thin by the continental conflict. An officer of the 4<sup>th</sup> Borders, writing early in 1915, described how the regiment was employed in musketry training, scouting and patrolling, digging and bayonet fighting, and he concluded that the men were "coming on splendidly."

Armer had fulfilled his required time in the Territorials by 1916 so he returned to England. However, he clearly remained devoted to duty and quickly re-enlisted with the 1<sup>st</sup> Border Regiment at Kendal on 28<sup>th</sup> June 1916. His previous military service stood him apart in training, and in August he was promoted to Lance Corporal. Then in September 1916 Armer was back in theatre, this time in France on the Western Front. During this period a sniper killed a fellow Kirkby-Lonsdale man, Harold Hardacre. Like Armer, Hardacre had been to India with the Borders, had returned and re-enlisted, and had been promoted Lance Corporal. Their service careers had run in parallel, and undoubtedly the two men had know each other in Kirkby before the war. Armer now had the unenviable task of writing to Mr W.H. Hardacre, informing him of his son's death. Shortly afterwards Armer's abilities had marked him out once again, leading him to be promoted Acting Corporal, before being sent back to England in December for a Temporary Commission. Consequently in the early months of 1917 Arthur Armer was training as an officer, officially being discharged from the 1<sup>st</sup> Borders on 29<sup>th</sup> May 1917, and gazetted as a 2<sup>nd</sup> Lieutenant to the 11<sup>th</sup> Battalion Border Regiment. It is not know when he joined his battalion in France after this appointment, but when he was killed in September he had only been there a 'short time'. Despite this short period with his new unit he was described by the Lieutenant-Colonel as a man loved by all ranks, and a emblem of courage and devotion to duty. This devotion can hardly be questioned in over three years of military service, beginning as a Private in a territorial formation and ending as a Lieutenant with the New Armies.

Unfortunately tragedy for the Armer family did not end with Arthur's death. His wife, Alice Ruth Armer, was also a patriot and joined the Women's Royal Air Force at Bristol on 14<sup>th</sup> October 1918. Alice Armer subsequently served as Member 22699, as a Technical Store Worker. Her military service was, however, short-lived and she died at the General Hospital, Cheltenham, on 12<sup>th</sup> November 1918. She had succumbed to the influenza epidemic sweeping across Europe, her official cause of death being cited as pneumonia. Ironically that flu epidemic would proceed to claim more victims than the Great War that had claimed the life of her husband Arthur Armer.

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### Links

Arthur Armer's entry on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Website, [http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty\\_details.aspx?casualty=89235](http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty_details.aspx?casualty=89235)

Alice Ruth Armer's entry on the Commonwealth War Graves Commission Website, [http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty\\_details.aspx?casualty=405711](http://www.cwgc.org/search/casualty_details.aspx?casualty=405711)

There are many good sites of information on the Spanish Flu pandemic of 1918, see for example, <http://virus.stanford.edu/uda/>

For more information on the trench warfare weapons, including the Minenwerfer, see the First World War.com, <http://www.firstworldwar.com/weaponry/mortars.htm>