

Press Release:

TheGenealogist launches the First World War issues of *The Sphere* newspaper

TheGenealogist has expanded its Newspaper and Magazine collection with the release of *The Sphere* that cover August 1914 to June 1919.

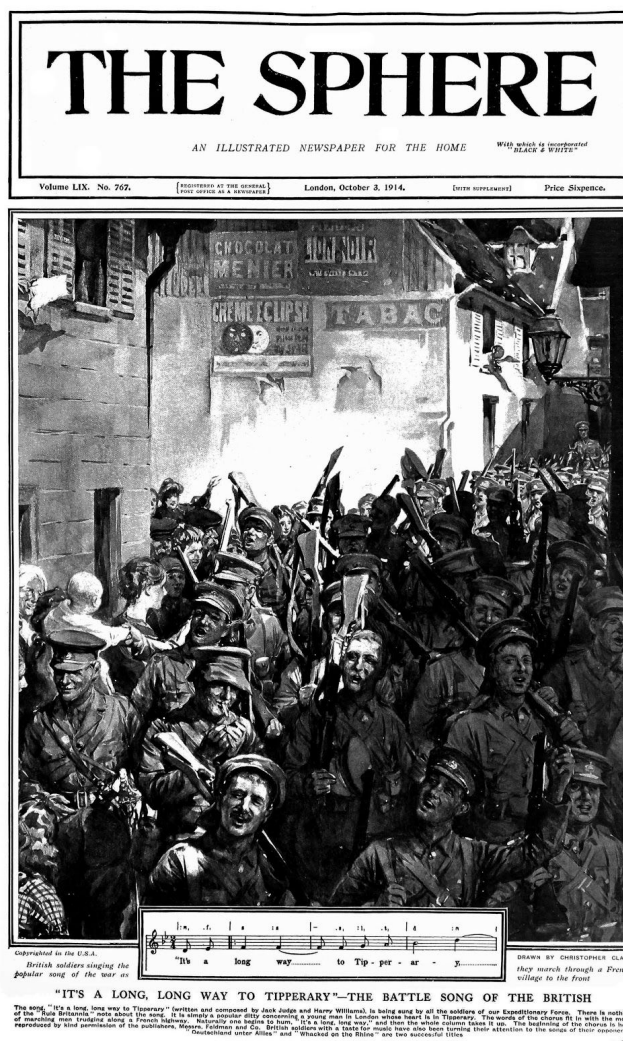
Using the Historical newspapers and magazines resource on TheGenealogist enables researchers to follow current affairs that may have affected or concerned our ancestors at the time. Because the articles were written as events were occurring, they provide contemporary accounts of the world that our ancestors lived in and can furnish us with great insights into opinions of the time. In the case of the First World War years, covered by this release of *The Sphere*, we can gain information about individuals or read about situations that are similar to ones that our ancestors may have found themselves in.

The Sphere was an illustrated paper founded by Clement Shorter (1857-1926) who was also responsible for establishing the *Tatler* and it covered general news stories from the UK and around the world.

War Memorials collection

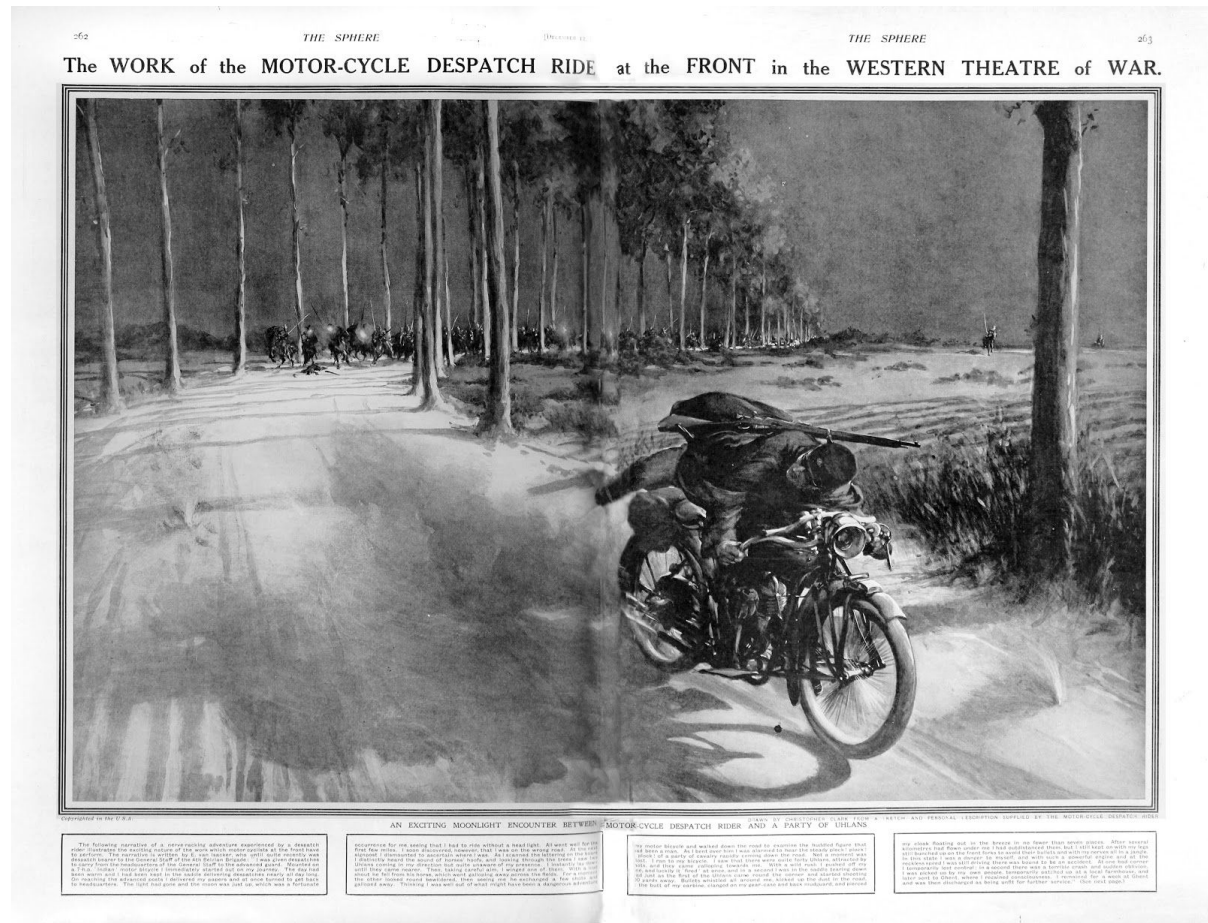
Also being released at this time by TheGenealogist are another **116 War Memorials** containing **10,795 names**. Included in this batch are a number of Boer War memorials as well as those for the First World War. With this addition the total figure for memorials on TheGenealogist has now reached **1,540 with 363,838 names**.

To search these and many other records on TheGenealogist, go to: www.thegenealogist.co.uk



The Sphere, providing insights into your ancestor's lives.

Nick Thorne uses the Newspaper and Magazines collection to better understand conditions in World War I



The Sphere December 12 1914

I have been looking a little closer into the war exploits of my step-grandfather. I knew that he had joined the Royal Engineers Special Reserve Motor Cyclist Division as a despatch rider but, like many of his generation that fought in the First World War, he didn't talk much about his experiences. What I did know was that he had found it 'quite exciting' to ride his despatches from headquarters to the front and back on a motorbike. He never expanded on this and certainly didn't tell us stories about his escapades, nor what it was like to be a soldier on two wheels.

With the recent release of copies of *The Sphere*, on TheGenealogist, I was thus fascinated to come across the December 12 1914 edition of the publication. Here was an article about motorcycle despatch riders from the early part of the war. This day's publication featured a double page evocative image of a motor-cycle despatch rider on his machine fleeing with the enemy on his tail. As I knew that my step-grandfather was in his late twenties at the time and a keen motorcycle rider I could imagine him reading pieces such as this and wanting to join up to the R.E. Motor Cyclists to 'do his bit'.

I know that Grandpa also served in the western theatre of war and so this image and the report that followed, resonated with me. I could now imagine him in similar situations as had been described and pictured in the newspaper. In this particular article from the newly released records, the rider telling his story suffers a whole lot of problems: *'On returning I take the wrong road and my machine gives trouble, and whilst repairing same I suddenly find myself surrounded by Uhlans.'* This narrator is captured, has his hands bound behind his back and he feigns illness. When his guard goes to fetch a doctor the British Tommy escapes by rolling into a ditch. This episode makes me realise that when my step-grandfather said it was 'quite exciting' this was probably a bit of an understatement. Their duties were certainly not a simple ride in the countryside.

The British Army in World War I would often use Douglas or Triumph Motorcycles for despatch riding duties which only had between 2 and 5 hp engines. Some riders, however, brought their own machines along when they joined up. These motorbikes would have to be inspected by the military to make sure that they were suitable for the purpose; but in the early days, when many of the men were volunteers, this would have meant that this section of the Royal Engineers Signals would have been up and running quickly. In my step-grandfather's case, however, looking at his attestation papers I can see that this part had been scored through - indicating that he would have had to be issued with an army bike.

Later in the First World War Grandpa was wounded and by reading other articles, such as that published on the 9th January 1915 about the RAMC work at the front, I got an understanding for how injured men were transferred in motorised omnibuses and ambulances that were also subject to breakdowns of their own.

Resources such as *The Sphere*, *The War Illustrated*, *The Great War*, *The Illustrated London News*, plus the other historical newspapers and magazines already found on TheGenealogist are great for building a picture of situations that our ancestors may have found themselves in. In some cases we may be lucky enough to find an ancestor actually named in a report - but even when that doesn't happen we can find write-ups that provide us with an understanding of the wider conditions in which our ancestors worked, played or went to war in.

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THE SPHERE
[DECEMBER 12, 1914]






E. van Isacker
Motor-cycle despatch-riding, lately assigned to the Belgian General Staff

The DIARY of a DESPATCH - RIDER Attached to the Belgian General Staff.

I was at home at Huy-sur-Mer when an order for general mobilisation surprised me at work. Off to Bruges, where I received my equipment for the campaign. The general of the 4th Brigade sent for me on August 2 and asked me to deliver a motor bicycle to the General Staff of the 1st Division. I was given a Scaldis motor bicycle of 2 1/2 hp. At midnight the bells sounded the departure for the frontier. The transport had gone the previous day. At 1 a.m. we left barracks in a down-pour of rain. The band was playing in the General Staff, to which I was attached, followed. The town turned out to cheer to three cigarettes, cakes, money and the ladies were waving every soldier. I was carried by friends for at least 200 yards; my bicycle also was carried triumphantly. Many trains waited on at Bruges Station, and at 5.15 a.m. the special train for the staff took us to Verriek, near Tielmont, to which town the whole division marched. At 1 p.m. I was sent from Tielmont with the first despatcher to Hasselt, returning the same afternoon, where another despatcher awaited me for Louvain, where I arrived at 6 p.m., and handed them to the burgomaster. Returned to Tielmont, and at 10 o'clock again off to Louvain, but on the way was stopped by the sentries, the password having been changed from the afternoon, when it was "—". Back to Tielmont to get new password, "—" and to Louvain. 11.20 p.m. Back at Tielmont, where I fell asleep from fatigue in the office. 4 a.m. next morning I was awakened by the ringing of the first alarm—big, stout German in a full hat, taken whilst cutting, idly, my wine. His hands were tied, and away to the cells. Was shot two days after.

To sleep again, 6 a.m. awakened again by the sentries on while officers have breakfast—some left for me at 7 a.m. Quiet till 9, when two spies brought in dressed as nuns. They were taken, begging for alms—a whole batch of papers of information about the neighbourhood found pinned to the inside of their skirts and in a basket two pigeons. Shot next day. At 10 a.m. arrival of the King at Tielmont. Amidst great shouts and cheers he comes to the General Staff, where I am sentry. In ten minutes I am wanted for despatches to Grimbode. On my return I lunch and am then set at a printing press to print the order of the day.

Further spies are brought in, among them two dressed as Capuchin monks with Red Cross armbands. To the cells. Afternoon further despatches to Hackendover and Cortich. Spies are being brought in all day—one man dressed as a nurse with a two-year old baby. Nurse to the cells, baby—what nationality?




A British Despatch-riding Awaiting Orders
To his machine are strapped his kit bag and all his other necessary equipment

British despatch-riding on a machine and carrying despatches in his fighting coat

A soldier has a bright idea. A sausage on the end of a bayonet is offered to the baby, who takes and eats it with gusto. Loud shouts from all. "Un allemand!" Baby sent to Brussels.

First Table d'armes seen in evening—shot at without effect.

At 10 p.m. Further despatch for Cortich. Back to bed.

At 4 a.m. on August 3 I am awakened. Despatches for Hallen.

At 8 a.m. further despatches, Hackendover and on returning we were at breakfast in the square where everybody started singing "La Marseillaise" on the arrival of French officers. Another Table d'armes, and a Belgian army band gives chase, without result. The rest of the day I am given liberty. Next day the King again visits us. At midday whilst eating we are all called up and march off to Haselton St. Marguerite, five kilometres away. The captain sends me to get some very good cigarettes as they may be the last he will smoke. About 4 p.m. we see the cannon arrive, and a whole mixed brigade. At 6 a.m. next morning another despatch for Grimbode. I did not stop soon enough for a centinel and got his bayonet through my cloak. Transport called—the Germans are seen in the neighbourhood of Dint coming from plundering Hasselt. Our advance guard captures a band of Uhlans splendidly equipped but half starved.

Despatches for Hallen. On returning I take the wrong road and my machine gives trouble, and whilst repairing same I suddenly find myself surrounded by ten Uhlans. I am stripped and searched for papers, but have none—none wish to shoot me, but finally take me and my machine with them to an officers' who question me in French. I reply in German that I am ignorant and am looking for my regiment. I am given in charge of a soldier and four horses and a carriage. My captor hopes me to fetch a doctor—my hands tied at my back. I fall into a ditch and make my way with water to my chin under the bushes far enough to lose sight of the Germans, then emerge and take to my heels. A peasant offers me my hands. I arrive at night at the General Staff and am given a fine machine—7 hp. Hallen. I remain with the General Staff whilst the battles of Ther, Hallen, near Aerschot, and Tielmont are fought, and on the retreat from Tielmont I am sent with despatches to the advanced guard. It was here that my machine and I came to grief. (See illustration on preceding pages).

At night, returning from the advanced guard, I had a most exciting encounter with some Uhlans which was unexpected so that I lost consciousness. I came for a few minutes in a farmhouse and saw a doctor and stretcher-bearer. I came to myself finally in the hospital at Ghent, where I remained for a week, and was then sent home as unfit for further service.

My three friends also despatch-riders, have been less fortunate than myself. All have gone.

Another use that we can make of this resource is where we have an ancestor who was unfortunate enough to have lost their lives, while serving as an officer in the First World War. In many editions of *The Sphere* Rolls of Honour were published. In these we are able to find a picture along with a few lines recording their loss. The Newspaper and Magazine collection is available to all Diamond subscribers of TheGenealogist.

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For more information please contact Nick at nick@thegenealogist.co.uk Telephone: 01722 717976