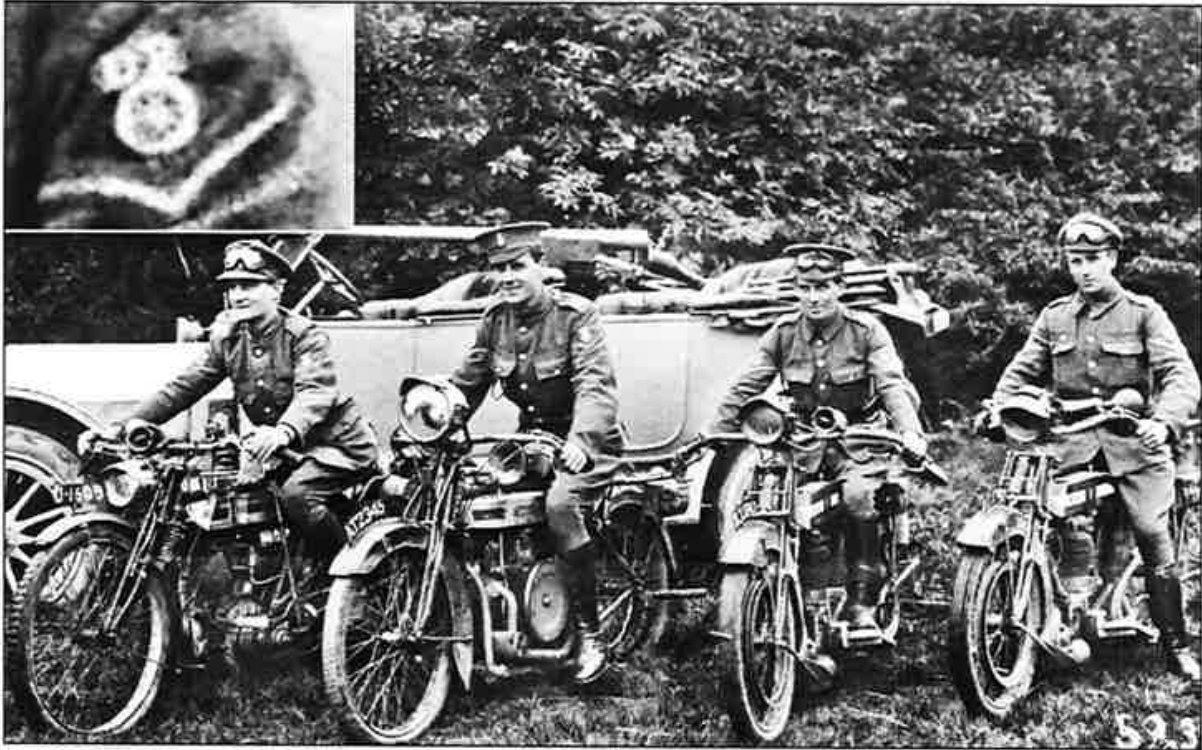


AN UNRECORDED DESPATCH RIDER'S ARM BADGE

by David J Knight



The photograph shows a group of four motorcycle despatch riders in 1913. To the left a member of the East Riding Yeomanry, identifiable by his collar badges and old 'ERYTY' shoulder titles, sits on a Zenith and next to him a member of the Yorkshire Hussars is on what appears to be a Douglas while the other two riders sit on BSAs and cannot be positively identified, though, if they are all members of the Yorkshire Mounted Brigade, Yorkshire Dragoons are to be expected and this may be indicated by the shape of the shoulder titles. All wear a distinctive arm badge, the letters 'D' and 'R' above a wheel. Such a badge was not recorded in the 1914 Clothing Regulations and known examples of despatch rider's badges are of the winged-wheel variety.¹ Other photographs of yeomanry despatch riders show no arm badge and the photograph in question is the only one that shows all of the riders with the rank of (Artificer?) Lance-Corporal. This indicates that both the arm badge and rank were peculiarities of the Yorkshire Mounted Brigade.

Motorcyclists had been sanctioned in the Expeditionary and Territorial Force by a Special Army Order of 15th July, 1910, which made provision for thirty-six motorcyclists in the Special Reserve of the Royal Engineers and 112 for units of the Territorial Force.² Three years later, motorcyclists were added to the Special Reserve Signal Companies of the Royal Engineers by a Special Army Order of 6th May, 1913 (AO 189/13). The Motor Cyclist Section would comprise three officers and 144 ORs, who were expected to provide their own machines and would be given the rank of

Motor Cycle Artificer Corporals. In order to extend this provision another Special Army Order was made on 19th June, 1913, which allotted motorcyclists to units as follows: 7 to each of 42 Yeomanry Regiment; 3 to each of 14 signal troops 8 to each of 14 divisional signal companies; 4 to each of 5 wireless signal companies; 5 to each of 5 signal cable companies; 3 to each of five airline signal companies; and 17 to each cyclist battalion.³ The order specified that motorcyclists would wear the uniform of the unit they were attached to and were required to provide and maintain a suitable motorcycle, for which they would receive a daily allowance of eight shillings under certain conditions to defray the expense of petrol, wear and tear and damage.

¹ I am indebted to Keith Hook for this information based on his consultation of Edwards and Langley's, *British Army Proficiency Badges*, 1 st ed, 1984 and also to Bob Wyatt for checking *Army Orders*

² AO 200 of August 1910 stated, 'A scheme for the provision of motor cyclists for service with certain units of the Expeditionary and Territorial Forces has been approved, and provisional regulations were issued as a *Special Army Order* dated 15th July 1910.' Details of the scheme were published in the *Devon and Exeter Gazette*, 25th and 29th July, 1910

³ Details published in the *Times*, 20th June 1913
