

DESERT AIRMAN

39122 SERGEANT REGINALD WALTER FORDER FITTER (AERO ENGINES), X FLIGHT 14 SQUADRON

BY RICHARD FORDER

This short account of service in the RFC was based on notes taken by me during an interview with my grandfather in 1972. I was serving in the RAF at the time so I did not see him very often. The next time we met he said that our conversation had awoken old memories and we should have another session.

Unfortunately, this was not to be as he died soon after in March 1973. After his death my aunts discovered various documents and photographs relating to his service which I suspect he had forgotten still existed. I am sure that a much more comprehensive account of his service would have emerged had we had the follow up session. The 60 plus photographs from his time in the desert would have benefited from his input as all but a few are not captioned.

REGINALD WALTER FORDER was born at 10 Francis Street, Wolverhampton on 2 December 1889. He was the ninth of ten children born to Alfred and Elizabeth Lucy Forder, a typically large Victorian family. His father was one of three brothers involved in the family coach building business with works in Wolverhampton and showrooms in London. Forder & Co Ltd built all manner of horse drawn vehicles but owed their fame to the design and manufacture of the ultimate and finest versions of the hansom cab.

Reginald, always known as Reg, was educated at Wolverhampton Higher Grade School. He did not follow his brothers into the family business which had ceased trading in 1907. His interest lay in the developing world of the motor cycle and motor vehicle. An early connection with the Military occurred with his enlistment as a Private, Service No 2364, in the Staffordshire Yeomanry on 20 July 1909 aged 18 years. Ironically, some of his indoor training was carried out in the glass covered yard of the first of two Carriage Works built for Forder & Co Ltd in the Cleveland Road, opposite the Royal Hospital. In the 1911 Census he is recorded as living with an elder brother, Charles, and a sister, Mary at No 5 Duke Street; and his occupation is listed as an electrical engineer employed in an Iron & Steel Works, almost certainly Messrs Alfred Hickman Ltd of Bilston, Wolverhampton. In the period leading up to the outbreak of WWI he was involved with a brother-in-law, Arthur Thomas, in the design and build of a new motorcycle named the *Orbit*. This was carried out in a back room of No 5 Duke Street. In the autumn of 1912 he married Emma Bloor in Coventry. Emma's home was in Penn, Wolverhampton.

It would seem that as a married man Reg found his prospects to be limited working in Wolverhampton. On 6 May

1914 he purchased his discharge from the Staffordshire Yeomanry¹ having served for almost five years. He also terminated his employment at the Iron & Steel Works, and moved to London. He was probably influenced by his three eldest brothers who had already established themselves in the capital. He was obviously successful as he returned in August to collect Emma and his daughter Josie, and move them to their new home at 86 Willoughby Road, Acton Vale. In the first two years of the war he was employed as an electrician and a motor mechanic. One of his employers was the Rotax Company, but there may have been others. He supplemented his income by carrying out private work. One of his private clients proved to be beneficial. Captain Barrington-White was ADC to the General Commanding the RFC, and Reginald had obviously discussed with him the possibility of his enlistment in the Corps.

On 17 July 1916 Barrington-White sent Reg to the RFC Recruiting Office at the Regent Street Polytechnic with a letter for Davis, presumably the RFC Recruiting Officer. He also gave Reg a note for Davis written on War Office notepaper which read:

Dear Davis

The bearer of this letter Mr RW Forder wishes to join the RFC. He has done a considerable amount of work for me and is a first rate electrician. The enclosed letter speaks for itself. Hope you will be able to make use of his services.

Yours sincerely

*Barrington-White Capt
ADC to GOC RFC*

Things then moved quickly. On 18 July Reg was registered under the National Registration Act 1915, Form 241 and was medically examined by No 2 Medical Board at White City. On 24 July, back at Regent Street, Reg confirmed his keenness to join the RFC and was dispatched to a Testing Centre on the Kings Road in Chelsea where he was enlisted as 39122 Air Mechanic 2nd Class on Transport. At 02.00 on the following morning he was given a Pass for Recruits, Army Form B.216, for travel by train from London to North Camp Station to join the RFC at the Farnborough Depot.

On the 25th, he commenced six weeks basic training. His pay was 1/6d per day, and he said that old sweats were charging 10/- to fold pugarees on pith helmets. Reg stated that there was a Light Aid Detachment at Farnborough at this time which acted as a repair unit. He also remarked that the Royal Aircraft Factory was developing an aero engine for the FE2b, FE2c and

