



Machine Gun Corps

The **Machine Gun Corps** (MGC) was a corps of the British Army, formed in October 1915 in response to the need for more effective use of machine guns on the Western Front in the First World War. The Heavy Branch of the MGC was the first to use tanks in combat and was subsequently turned into the Tank Corps, later called the Royal Tank Regiment. The MGC remained in existence after the war until it was disbanded in 1922.

History

At the outbreak of the First World War in August 1914, the tactical potential of machine guns was not appreciated by the British armed forces. The prevalent attitude of senior ranks at the outbreak of the Great War can be summed up by the opinion of an officer (albeit expressed a decade earlier) that a single battery of machine guns per army corps was a sufficient level of issue.

After a year of warfare on the Western Front it was self-evident that to be fully effective - in the opinion of former sceptics - that machine guns must be used in larger units and some commanders advocated crewing them with specially trained men who not only thoroughly conversant with their weapons but who understood how they should be best deployed for maximum effect. To achieve this, the Machine Gun Corps was formed in October 1915 with Infantry, Cavalry, and Motor branches, followed in 1916 by the Heavy Branch. A depot and training centre was established at Belton Park in Grantham, Lincolnshire, and a base depot at Camiers in France.

The MGC saw action in all the main theatres of war, including France, Belgium, Palestine, Mesopotamia, Egypt, Salonika, East Africa and Italy. In its short history, the MGC gained an enviable record for heroism as a front line fighting force. Indeed, in the latter part of the war, as tactics changed to defence in depth, it commonly served well in advance of the front line. It had a less enviable record for its casualty rate. Some 170,500 officers and men served in

the MGC, with 62,049 becoming casualties, including 12,498 killed, earning it the nickname 'the Suicide Club'