

THOMAS PORTEOUS BLACK

Captain, 9th Battalion, Sherwood Foresters, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire Regiment



Thomas Porteous Black was born in 1878, at the stationmaster's house at Shotts, a small rural town in Lanarkshire in the central Lowlands of Scotland. From 1892 he attended the Queen Elizabeth's Grammar School, Darlington and there, in 1896, won a scholarship to Durham.

He matriculated in the Michaelmas Term of 1895 and took his B.A. in Classical and General Literature in June 1898. In 1900, he transferred to the College of Science at Newcastle upon Tyne to pursue a further three years of studies in mathematics and physics. Black took an A.Sc (Associate of Science) with Honours in physics there in 1901, and was awarded his M.A. the same year. In 1902, he became a lecturer in physics and proceeded to an M.Sc. in 1903.

In 1903, Black became a Royal Exhibition Scholar. This and a further award enabled him to leave for Germany to undertake a Ph.D at the University of Strasbourg, at that time a self-consciously German institution. Two years later, he completed his Ph.D., entitled '*Über den Widerstand von Spulen für schnelle elektrische Schwingungen*', or 'Concerning the resistance of coils for fast electrical oscillations'. He left Strasbourg at the end of 1905.

Black returned to Britain and took up a position as lecturer in physics at what was then known as the University College, Nottingham (now Nottingham University). In April 1909, he married his Scottish fiancée, Agnes Edward Dickson Mackie.

St. Cuthbert's Alumni Association

The alumni association of St. Cuthbert's Society, Durham University

In 1911, he was appointed as University College Registrar (responsible for handling student records) and, in 1913, together with a colleague, he published *An Introduction to Practical Physics for Colleges and School*. This proved a tremendous success and continued to be used in schools well into the 1950s.

In February 1914, Black's wife, Agnes, died aged thirty years old, of ovarian cancer. Thereafter, Black, already one of the most loyal and practical supporters of the University's Officer Training Corps, took an increasing part in its work. He trained enthusiastically with the 'Sherwood Foresters' – as the Nottinghamshire Regiment was known.

On 1 October 1914, Lieutenant T. P. Black transferred to the Regular Army, gazetted to the 9th Battalion of the 'Sherwood Foresters' (Nottingham and Derby) Regiment. Three months later he was promoted to Captain. In 1915, Black left Nottingham and joined his regiment. He served as Captain in 'A' Company of the 9th Battalion, which formed part of the 11th (Northern) Division; one of Kitchener's first 'New Army' divisions.

In July 1915, the 11th Division sailed from Liverpool and, on 20 July, the 9th Battalion embarked for the Gallipoli Peninsula. The Turkish army which, from its vantage point, could see almost everything that moved, gave the battalion a warm reception, opening up a heavy artillery barrage on the landing place. After ten days, the battalion and the rest of the brigade, was ordered back to the nearby island of Imbros. Although many men were stricken with dysentery, with the simplest of tasks proving difficult, they could at least bathe and relax.

The battalion finally moved forward during the night of 7-8 August, ready for an attack on 9 August. There still seems to have been no clear plan as to what the exact aims of this attack were and, while some brigades sat doing nothing, others were heavily engaged. On 9 August, the Sherwood Foresters took part in attacks on so-called Chocolate Hill.

It was amid this melée, on 9 August, that Black was killed. Sadly, his death was neither quick nor painless. Gravely injured in the assault, he lay for some time in front of the Turkish lines. One of his men bravely dashed out, picking him up and carrying him back to where the remaining survivors of the Sherwoods held their ground. This earned him the Distinguished Conduct Medal. Thomas Porteous Black died of his wounds later that day, aged 37. He has no known grave.