

### Minutes BMS ZOOM 4.2.2021 [19.27-20.35hrs]

In attendance, 8 BMS members and 9 guests.

#### 'Research Never Ends - More Henderson Research' by Roger Bragger.

Roger's research on Thomas Henderson has covered the last thirty years and he was welcomed to give the update on his material.

Several of the themes in tonight's talk have arisen in the BMS meetings over the years, in particular, the digitised era in which we live and its incredible power to access data and link people. We should review and revisit our research periodically. [For more on this theme, may I refer readers to 21<sup>st</sup> July, 2019 Miniconvention talk 'PRO Purchase-Research-Outcome' by Paul Handford and Dave Seeney's talk 5<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 on 'New Military Research on the Internet'].

The starting point for tonight's talk is the purchase in 1990 of medals to Captain Thomas Henderson MC.,AFC., RE and attached RFC [MC 'Military Cross', AFC 'Air Force Cross', RE 'Royal Engineers' and RFC 'Royal Flying Corps']. The reverse of his MC is engraved 'awarded for flying services in Hejaz 1916-17'. There was no research at all with the medals.



**Above:** Captain Thomas Henderson medal group Left to right: MC,AFC, WWI trio with MiD oakleaves and Territorial decoration. The Territorial decoration is a correct entitlement but was not in the original sale [with apologies for poor image quality].

Twenty-five years later, Roger had received an email from Hamish McGregor [present as a guest tonight] the step-grandson of Thomas Henderson. Hamish had many family photos and a 1915 flying logbook belonging to Henderson.

Roger went on to explain that Thomas Henderson was twice married, first to Edith Deuchar in 1922 [divorced 1926] and second, to Elsie McGregor [née Pollard] 1931. They divorced in 1936.

### The Pollard/McGregor/Henderson family tree, connections and information.

Elsie Gladys McGregor [née Pollard and Hamish's grandmother] had married her first husband James McGregor in 1914. In 1918, they had had a son Alistair but Elsie had then been widowed in 1923. In 1931, she had remarried to Thomas Henderson but the marriage was dissolved in 1936.

Information from his confidential RAF file indicated that, in 1926, Henderson was invited to resign his RAF commission by virtue of 'keeping himself unfit for flying by reasons of drink [alcohol]' Other posts held by Henderson [which he was to leave after this divorce from Edith Deuchar] were Associate Member of the Institute of Automobile Engineers, Fellow of the Royal Geographic Society and a Fellow of the Royal Society of Arts.

In 1919 after WWI had ended, Henderson was second in command of a mission to deliver 51 Handley-Page bombers to Egypt – this was done for a local show of force. He was promoted to Officer in command [OC] during the mission. The long flight was no mean achievement in the era as it had to be done as a series of 300 mile 'hops' with no major maintenance en route [after the war, all the RAF mechanics and riggers had been demobbed]. Unsurprisingly, only 20 of the machines arrived some three months later. For this, Henderson was awarded the AFC.



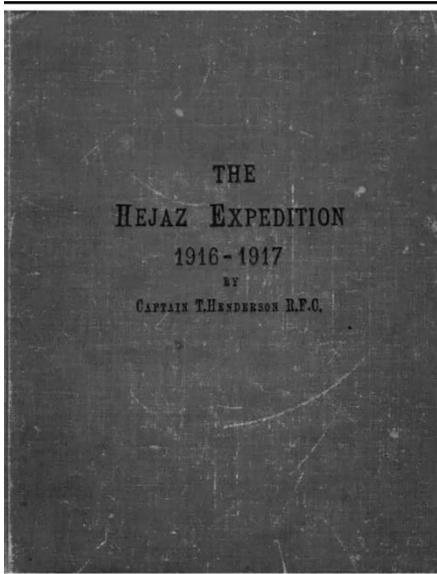
**Above:** Henderson [right] is pictured with Captain T.E. Lawrence ['Lawrence of Arabia'] taken in Italy 1919. Lawrence was a passenger in Henderson's plane for some of the journeys.

### Hejaz 19216-17:

The Kingdom of Hejaz is located in modern Saudi Arabia now. In 1916, there had been an Arab revolt in the Arab Kingdom of Hejaz against the Ottoman Empire [the Turks]. The Turks had successfully suppressed the rebels with their superior and heavy weaponry as well as aircraft.

Lawrence of Arabia, in his role as military liaison and intelligence, was tasked to enquire of the rebels' needs, identify and work closely with the eventual leader of the revolt Emir Faisal [Proclaimed King of the Arabs in 1916 – later to be King of Greater Syria and Iraq from 1920 to the early 1930's - his eventual full title was 'Faisal I bin Al-Hussein bin Ali Al-Hashemi']. The rebels urgently required weapons especially aeroplanes, the latter becoming known as 'Lawrence's Air Force'.

Captain T Henderson wrote a book about his experiences whilst in Hejaz [The copy in the photograph below is owned by the Imperial War Museum].



**Above:** Cover of T. Hendersons' book 'The Hejaz Expedition'.

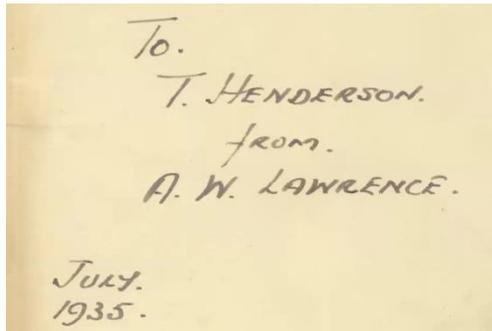
In his pursuit of Henderon's military records, Roger was required to identify a relative for this. Although this was no easy task, discovering more distant relatives then became a serendipitous and vital link to accessing more ephemera.

In the Henderson family tree, it could be established that Henderson had 3 brothers and a sister all of whom had been childless. A copy of Henderson's mother's will showed she had left legacies to a beneficiary named Davies. Thomas Henderson's younger brother James Henderson had married a 'Davies' so this named beneficiary was one of James's nephews.

By telephoning this family's members, Roger was asked 'Why the interest in Henderson?' to which he received a further response 'There's a box of his stuff in the loft!!'

Inside this box was Henderson's Order of Al-Nahda 4<sup>th</sup> class, along with a private photograph album and the desperate letter written by W.G. Stafford when lost in the desert in Hejaz on 22<sup>nd</sup> June, 1917. A search had been mounted to find him with Henderson in charge of the land search and the CO Stent in charge of the air search to find them.

Also in the box was a copy of the 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom'. This book [published 1926] was T.E.Lawrence's own account of his involvement in the Arab revolt. After T.E.Lawrence's death in a motorcycle accident in 1935, A.W.Lawrence, his youngest brother, had compiled a book 'Lawrence of Arabia by His Friends' with various chapters contributed by people who'd known him. This copy of 'Seven Pillars of Wisdom' was a thank-you from A.W. Lawrence to Henderson for his contribution.



**Left:** Henderson's thank you note from A.E.Lawrence.

Roger eventually was able to buy the box of ephemera which reunited Henderson's Order of Al-Nahda 4<sup>th</sup> class with his original medal group.

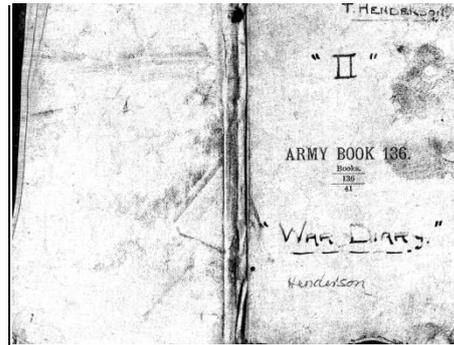
Roger was then successful in purchasing the W.G.Stafford Medal group at auction. His medal group contains a DCM ['Distinguished Conduct Medal'] one of about 90 to the RFC, a no clasp China medal 1900 where he'd served as a balloonist, WWI trio and an army LSGC ['Long Service and Good Conduct'] one of only 32 check to the RFC. For more information on the medal group to Stafford MC., DCM and further photos, there are the meeting notes of 5.4.2018 ['Centenary of the RAF' by John Scott].

Stent's medal group was another purchase some five years later.

**Picture below:** Hejaz Officer group photo in 1917 comprising top left: The Reverend V.D.Siddons, MBE, DFC; top right: Fl Lt W.G.Stafford, MC, DCM; lower left: Henderson and lower right: Wing Commander F.W.Stent, MC, the CO.

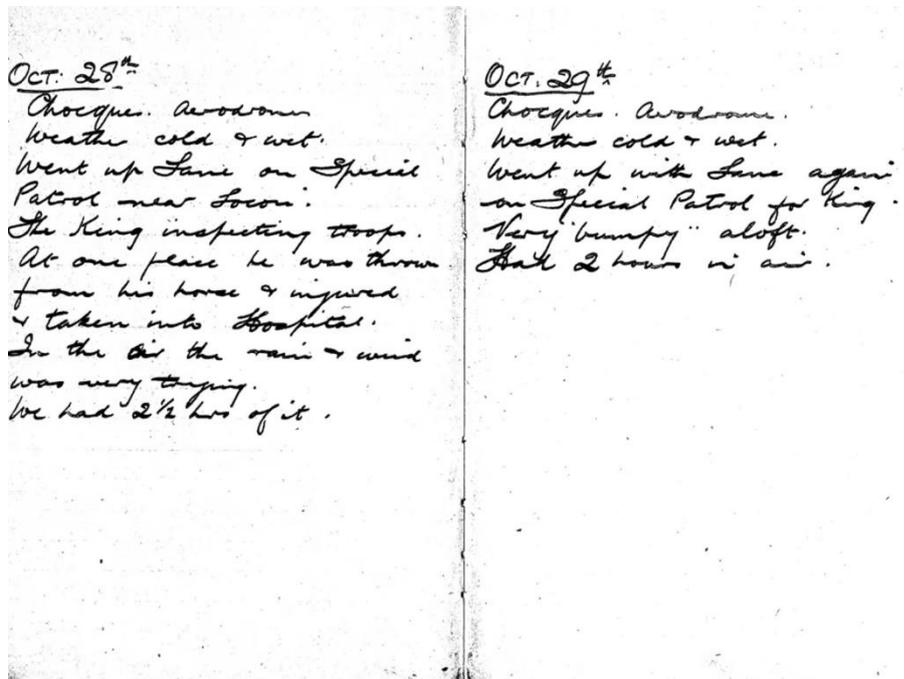


At one point briefly for research purposes only, Roger had reunited the awards to all the officers in the above photograph by virtue of being loaned Siddons' medal group [by the Siddon's family]



**Picture right** : cover of T. Henderson's 'Army Book II'

**Picture below:** Two pages from Log 'II' describing sorties flown by T. Henderson in 1915. He was an observer in an SE5 plane [Attached RFC from RE]



**Picture below:** T. Henderson – This photograph from his

home guard service shows him wearing sergeant's stripes, his medal ribbons and his flying wings.



### **Other Henderson relatives and achievements:**

Considerable detail was given about Henderson's stepson Major James Alastair McGregor DSO, MC. He served in the SAS. In 1943, he was parachuted into Southern Italy with 7 others with the task of assisting escaped POWs [His group were able to assist some 500 escapees altogether over a 2week period for which he was awarded the DSO at the young age of 25years]. They were especially active in night operations ambushing german transports and suppressing the activity and authority of local Italian fascists



**Pictured right:** Henderson's stepson Major James Alastair McGregor.

Major Alastair McGregor's Medals



Distinguished Service Order (DSO), Military Cross (MC), 1939-45 Star, Africa, Italy, France & Germany, 1939-45 Defence Medal, War Medal 1935-45, General Service Medal with clasp Palestine & Malaya, Coronation Medal 1952, Greek War Cross, and Croix de Guerre.

Under the name of 'Captain Beverley', McGregor was stationed near Nancy in France from Autumn, 1944 till the end of the war [for this, he was awarded the MC and, in France, the award of the Croix de Guerre. Post WWII, he was seconded to the French Foreign Legion [FFL] and in 1947 to the Palestine Police.

Although a squadron prepared for a posting to Korea [which didn't happen], he volunteered to joined Captain Calvert in B squadron [which would become 22 SAS] . With safety in mind for jungle landings in Malaya, they practiced parachuting where, one morning, he did eight jumps!

In 1953, he was back with the FFL in Indochina [and by then, had recorded over 200 parachute jumps..]

Other distant Henderson relatives in this include George Osborne [Coalition Chancellor of the Exchequer] and Samantha Sheffield [who is the wife of former Prime Minister David Cameron].

Yet another more distant relative was Captain Robert Falcon Scott ['Scott of the Antarctic'] whose two voyages to Antarctica are well documented. In 1901-04, the 'Discovery' and the ill-fated 1910-13 'Terra Nova' expeditions.



**Pictured above:** Captain Robert Falcon Scott CVO.

Roger ended his talk with three other distant family connections from the 'Robert Peel' tree that he'd dubbed 'The Good, the Bad and the Ugly' from the 'Robert Peel' tree were:

Lt Colonel Henry Harley DSO was the 'Good'

He had a son Robert Paul Harley [the 'Bad']. He'd changed his name but, despite this, he in the British Census of September, 1939, as a resident of Maidstone Prison serving 7yrs [with 2yrs hard labour and 20 lashes] for the Mayfair Jewellery Heist. His wife, Mrs Freda Harley was to petition for divorce from her husband on grounds of the 'hardship and depravity' clause of the Matrimonial Causes Act 1937.

Finally, Gordon Cummings a 26 year old RAF cadet and distant relative was the 'Ugly' – He was found guilty of the murder of three women [at least] in 1943 and was executed. He was dubbed by the press as 'most notorious killer since Jack the Ripper'.

And finally, a distant link with Robert Peel and I quote!!

'..Thomas Henderson is related to Robert Peel the 2<sup>nd</sup> Baronet - he is the '6<sup>th</sup> Great Grandfather of the husband of the niece of the wife of the brother-in-law of the great uncle of the wife of the great nephew of the wife of the first cousin once removed'...

Many thanks to all for their contributions and to our speaker for a most enjoyable ZOOM!

With my usual apologies for any errors and typos. My thanks to Roger Bragger for use of images from his presentation.

C. Davies [Typed 23.2.21-3.3.21].

BMS Secretary.

For more information on tonight's talk, members may wish to view Roger Bragger's website [rogersstudy.co.uk](http://rogersstudy.co.uk).