

**BIRMINGHAM MEDAL SOCIETY – THURSDAY 7<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2023**  
**'WILLIAM MURRAY GRAHAM – FLYING FOR FRANCE'. PAUL HANDFORD MBE**

Paul's talk concerned a medal group he purchased some years ago that has a rather unique element to the story of the Great War experiences of the medals' recipient, as an Englishman, of Mr William Murray Graham.

The medal Group:

1. C.M.G. (Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George (Companion's neck badge) London Gazette 2 January 1950
2. C.B.E (Commander of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire – Commander's 2nd type neck badge) London Gazette 1 January 1946.
3. Order of the Nile (2<sup>nd</sup> Class)
4. Military Medal . G.V.R., (Unnamed)
5. WW1 Victory Medal (Correctly Lieut. W.M. Graham R.F.C.)
6. WW1 War Medal (Correctly Lieut. W.M. Graham R.A.F.)
7. 1953 Coronation medal,
8. French Croix de Guerre 1914 – 1916 (*Avec Étoile et palme*)
9. French médaille des engagés volontaires.
10. Accompanying miniatures.



Previous research accompanying the medal group suggested that William Murray Graham had served with the French Service Aéronautique during the Great War.

So revisiting the research and examining documents now available on-line, seeking help with the on-line research from Paul's wife Su and understand the French records with the help of his French friend Monsieur Mansuy, Paul set out to build a more detailed picture of WMG's war experience and try and confirm his unnamed British Military Medal award and his French Croix de Guerre award with citations.

William Murray Graham was born in December 1884 and was educated at Newton College in Devon and Corpus Christi, Oxford. Qualifying in law, he was called to the Bar by Lincoln's Inn in 1907 and went out to the Straits Settlements as an Advocate and Solicitor in 1910 for Drew and Napier Barristers and Solicitors, a legal firm founded in 1889 by Walter John Napier and Alfred Henry Drew.

It would seem William Murray Graham was on leave in Britain at the outbreak of war but was unable to obtain a commission on account of having been employed overseas.

His 1914 Star Medal Index Card shows he served in a British Field Ambulance in Belgium. Like many individuals, who for whatever reason, could not serve with the British Expeditionary Force donned a Red Cross brassard and served with a volunteer medical unit under the banner of the British Red Cross, French Red Cross or Belgian Red Cross. Paul said he is unable to identify, at the moment, the exact volunteer Field Ambulance WMG was attached to in Belgium.

It is clear from WMG's Medal Index Card he applied for the 1914 Star but was deemed ineligible as **"He did not serve on the establishment of an authorized unit of the B.E.F. British Expeditionary Force"**.

WMG's British War and Victory Medal Roll provided the next clue to his war experience. According to the Medal Roll in January 1915 he became a Lieutenant in the British Ambulance Committee (British Committee of the French Red Cross)

This detail is also recorded on his 1914 Star Medal Card.

The British Ambulance Committee (BAC) was a completely **independent** body formed expressly to provide motorized ambulance convoys for the French wounded at the actual front. The BAC eventually provided five Ambulance Convoys and a Motorcycle sidecar convoy. The first two convoys, designated Section Sanitaires Anglaise (SSAs) arrived in the Vosges part of the French Sector in January 1915 and so this suggests WMG was a member of one of these two SSAs. Paul stated the location of SSA 1 serving in the immediate Vosges front would suggest WMG was a member of SSA1.

The Medal Roll shows his service with the British Ambulance Committee ended in October 1915. So where or what did he do next? Well, Paul believes that WMG's experiences with the BAC in the Vosges would have seen him witness the Escadrille (Squadron) of French Service Aéronautique that was posted to the French Army of the Vosges at this time.

So, with access to the French Ministère des Défense website **the Mémoire des Homme**, Paul was able to access WMG's Service Aéronautique personnel cards (Personnel de l'aéronautique militaire) and with the help of Monsieur Mansuy and the assistance of members of the French Website 'Forum Pages 14-18', Paul was able to understand and 'time-line' WMG's service in the French Service Aéronautique.

To summarise his French Service Aéronautique service:

First of all, like all foreigners who wished to serve in the French Service Aéronautique, enlistment in the Foreign Legion (Légion étrangère) was the only way for a foreign national to be incorporated into the French army.

On 18<sup>th</sup> October 1915, the same month he had left the British Ambulance Committee he joined the Service Aéronautique designated as 'Engagé Volontaire Pour la Durée de la Guerre'( Engaged for the duration of the war) and on 20<sup>th</sup> October started training as a student pilot in French aviation at Avord.

On 28<sup>th</sup> January 1916 he was posted to Escadrille MF14 (Maurice Farman) and during his service with this Escadrille on the Vosges Sector he was awarded the French Croix de Guerre, Citation date 18.9.1916. No citation details of this Croix de Guerre have been found to-date.

In February 1917 he attended fighter pilot school at Pau and in March 1917 was assigned to Escadrille N76 (later renamed SPA 76) under French Ace Rene Doumer, as Sergeant and eventually Adjutant.

The excellent website by Albin Denis <http://albinderis.free.fr> provides exceptional detail about the two Escadrilles that WMG served in including a photograph of him wearing his Croix de Guerre and Military Medal. Photographs also include images of his personal airplanes and his personal mechanic Monsieur Jean Ferragne.

Paul provided detail of WMG's Military Medal, which was confirmed on his R.A.F. papers and although the date and circumstances surrounding this award as an unnamed MM are not known, it is likely this was an Honorary Award to a foreign national.

During his service with Escadrille N.76 he was awarded his second Croix de Guerre, and the citation below is provided by the records at the French Aviation School at Pau - *Aéronautique Militaire* and the Journal Officiel de la République française, 2 Decembre 1917(Gallica – BnF (Bibliothèque nationale de France)

It is interesting to note the pilots of N 76, were based at Le ferme de Rosnay 19<sup>th</sup> January 1917 and Bouleuse 23<sup>rd</sup> April 1917, and were engaged in the second battle of the Aisne from 16<sup>th</sup> April to 7<sup>th</sup> May 1917. Although offensive was eventually called off the fighting carried on for another two weeks and so it is interesting to note WMG was wounded 12<sup>th</sup> May 1917.

***Croix de Guerre with Star and Palm (Avec Étoile et palme) - Army Order General No. 258 Citation – 31<sup>st</sup> August 1917Le Général MICHELER, commandant la Ve Armée cite.***

***GRAHAM , adjutant pilot, of Escadrille N.76, of English nationality, he was engaged for the duration of the War in the French Aviation Corps. From the moment of his arrival, he was an admirable volunteer, offering himself for every mission and participating in numerous combats, most notably on 20 May, and on the 6, 24 and 29 July. On 27 July last, having fought a combat with an enemy biplane, he in turn was attacked by a second enemy aircraft which he was unable to see, and in spite of its gunner's actions, he remained calm in the face of his two adversaries, forcing them to retreat behind their lines.'***

On 19<sup>th</sup> August 1917, for reasons unknown, WMG transferred to the Royal Flying Corps(RFC)

His Royal Air Force Personnel Card provides a summary of his service both as a member of the RFC and the RAF.

On joining the RFC he flew the following described machines: Farmans, Blériot, Morane Panhard,Nieuport, Spad, Sopwith 2 Seater and RE 8.

On 19<sup>th</sup> September 1917 The London Gazette detailed William Murray Graham as Temp. 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt. Royal Flying Corps (18<sup>th</sup> September 1917)

In October 1917 he passed gun tests at 56 Training Squadron at London, Colney (Fixing Jams & Stoppages in air on Spad)

He was Acting Adjutant in 7<sup>th</sup> Aircraft Pk. RFC with the Italian Expeditionary Force for five weeks. This Aircraft Park was formed in January 1918 and was a supply depot dealing with aircraft and aircraft spares in Northern Italy

After a posting to Canada on 'Recruiting Duties' in Canada in October 1919 WMG is recorded to the Home List

The naming of WMG's British War Medal and Victory Medals were an interesting aspect of the research and Paul thanked Mr John Scott of Birmingham Medal Society for his help and guidance and in particular identifying that this subject had been discussed in the **Order and Medals Research Society journals** in the 1970s.

In the Winter 1975 & Spring 1976 Journal, The Royal Air Force - Naming of Great War Medals by Norman G Gooding and the Spring 1978 Journal, The Royal Air Force - Naming of Great War Medals by Squadron Leader J. Routledge.

The articles help explain why WMG's British War Medal and Victory Medal are named differently. The formation of the RAF in April 1918 is a critical date.

If an officer/man transferred to the **R.A.F.** on **1<sup>st</sup> April 1918** and after this date either served or continued to serve in a theatre of war his **BWM & VM** were named **R.A.F.** and issued by the **R.A.F.**

If an officer/man transferred to the **R.A.F.** on **1<sup>st</sup> April 1918** and **did not serve** in a theatre of war before **11<sup>th</sup> November 1918**, his **BMW & VM** were named **R.F.C.** and issued by the **R.A.F.**

Regarding **2/Lt. William Murray Graham – If**, after **1<sup>st</sup> April 1918** he either entered a theatre of war on duty or left his place of residence and rendered approved service overseas (**24/4/1918 Canada "Recruiting**

**duties**”).) this would result in his **BWM** being named **R.A.F.** and his **VM** being named **R.F.C.** and issued by the **R.A.F.**

These rules also apply to former members of the **R.N.A.S.**

Paul, highlighted that WMG's 1914 Star personnel card clearly details the British War and Victory Medal Roll being issued as French Red Cross.

After the war WMG returned to the legal profession and went to Egypt and was largely responsible for drafting the laws of the proposed British Protectorate.

He served as a legal advisor in the Egyptian Government Service.

In 1929 was appointed a Judge of the Mixed Court of Cairo.

From 1934-49 served as a Judge of the Cairo Court of Appeal and as Legal Counsellor to the British Embassy in Cairo.

During the Second World War he founded and managed the United Services Club of Alexandria, known to thousands of service men who passed through Alexandria.

He was Chairperson of the British Manpower Board of Egypt and of the British Schools Board for nine years.

He was Hon. Secretary of the Lady Cromer Dispensaries in Egypt and Commodore of the Royal Yacht Club of Egypt ~for eleven years and a member of the Royal Fowey Yacht Club.

On 1<sup>st</sup> January 1946 the London Gazette detailed that Judge William Murray Graham, Judge of the Egyptian Mixed Court of Appeal, was appointed to be an Additional Commander of the Civil Division of the Most Excellent Order of the British Empire in the New Year Honours List 1946.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> January 1950 the London Gazette detailed that Judge Graham, was appointed to be Companion of the Most Distinguished Order of Saint Michael and Saint George in London Gazette dated the New Year Honours List of 1950.

On 3<sup>rd</sup> January 1950 the London Gazette detailed that Judge William Murray Graham had been awarded the Order of the Nile – Second Class.

The history of the Mixed Courts of Egypt by Jasper Yeates Brinton provided interesting details of WMG's work in the courts of Egypt.

In 1953 WMG was awarded the Queen Elizabeth II Coronation Medal 1953 – William Murray Graham, Counsellor.

In 1956 WMG died. His obituary notice stated Mr W. M. Graham C.M.G., C.B.E., Legal Counsellor to the British Embassy in Cairo, died in hospital at Worcester yesterday (21/11/1956) at the age of 71.

So, concluding, an apparently unique group of medals to a British gentleman who “Flew for France” during 1916 – 1917.

#### Sources:

- Military Records: Ancestry.( 1914 Star Medal Index Card and British War and Victory Medal Roll) Royal Air Force Records.
- Mémoire des Hommes, French Ministry of Defense records (William Murray Graham's Service Aéronautique Militaire Personnel Cards)
- London Gazette (Awards of WMG's C.M.G., C.B.E., Order of the Nile.
- Gallica – BnF (Bibliothèque nationale de France) Journal officiel de la République française 2 Decembre 1917 and Pau – French Aéronautique Militaire (Award of Croix de Guerre citation 31st August 1917)
- Mixed Courts of Egypt by Jasper Yeates Brinton

- The Orders and Medals Research Society Journals, Winter 1975 & Spring 1976 Journal, The Royal Air Force - Naming of Great War Medals by Norman G Gooding and the Spring 1978 Journals, The Royal Air Force -Naming of Great War Medals by Squadron Leader J. Routledge.
- Cornish Guardian 29 November 1956 , Death of Mr W M GRAHAM ( Provides details of WMG's life)
- Drew and Napier Barristers and Solicitors ( History of the Firm)
- For Dautless France, by Laurence Binyon ( Background to British Ambulance Committee formation)
- French Service Aéronautique ( Escadrille M14 and N76) Albin Denis <http://albindenis.free.fr> ( History of Escadrille M14 and N76 and photographs of WMG)
- Royal Air Force Flying Training and Support Units since 1912  
by Ray Sturtivant (Author), James J. Halley (Author), John F. Hamlin Author) and Ray Sturtivant  
ISO (Editor) (Understanding WMG's RAF papers)