

Minutes BMS meeting 7.3.19

1. Welcome from President Roger Bragger.
2. Apologies received: M. Atkinson, J. Barker, C. Burns, J. Carver, M. Platt, D. Rees, J. Scott, D. Seeney, P. Wilson and H. Vaugh.
3. Stats: M 6, D 4 and ONS 1.
4. No new members.
5. Library requests/Research questions. Secretary to request book list for addition to BMS website.
6. Functions/Visits. President informed the group that he'd received thanks from the son of the late Jeff Taylor and that a substantial sum had been raised for the 'Air Ambulance'.
7. Committee points. The committee is planning to meet just before the AGM on 4.4.19, two committee places remain unfilled [Nominations welcomed]. Secretary to prepare agenda for AGM and Committee meeting.

Miniconvention news – 19 confirmed attendees so far - M Harrison will post cheques thus far received to the treasurer [Treasurer's apologies already noted above]. M Harrison will be away for three months so any further requests for miniconvention tickets/cheques/cash to secretary C Davies please in the meantime please.
8. Tonight's talk. Paul Handford - 'On the Lines of Communication'.
9. Next meeting - 4.4.2019 - AGM followed by talk 'Easter Rising 1916' by D. Seeney.

'On the Lines of Communication' by Paul Handford.

Paul introduced his subject as the 'Lines of Communication' ['LOC'] with reference to the Western Front and would show medals to British Volunteers in this regard. This was the first time he'd given the talk and members will recall that it was originally scheduled for March 2018!

Paul commented several times on how often he'd heard the phrase 'just a pair' reference WW1 medals but this often belied the history, experiences, bravery, documentation and even original photographs which might accompany such medals. All of us concurred with this sentiment.

'LOC' included the behind the scenes work, recovery and transport of the wounded and motor ambulance maintenance teams. Paul reflected that there were differences between French and British management of casualties – from recovery of the casualty – there was the initial assessment [for the French 'Poste de secours'; for the British 'Regimental aid post'], then more detailed assessment ['Poste de Triage' for the French and 'Advanced dressing station' for the British] followed by arrival at a hospital facility ['Hopital d'Evacuation' for the French and 'Casualty Clearing Station' for the British] – these were usually positioned near the railway lines – some casualties were transported using converted barges on the canal system.

Chauffeur John Arthur Platt was part of the British Red Cross [BRC] 'Boulogne Motor Ambulance Convoy' . He'd been awarded the 1914 star with bar for service between 5.8.1914 and 22.11.1914 – an estimated 2000 1914 stars had been issued to BRC and Order of St John of Jerusalem [OStJJ] though numbers with the bar entitlement were unknown [only issued with clasp 5th August- 22nd Nov 1914 if service had been under fire]. He later joined the RAF.



Above: WWI trio to John Arthur Platt

Much vehicle maintenance was required and Paul showed some stunning original photos of the 'Motor repair works' which had taken over the fisheries buildings at Quai Gambetta, Boulogne. There was even a blacksmith's forge to be seen! The level of activity was staggering with 7 sections dealing with mechanical problems of 100-200 ambulance vehicles 24 hours a day. Examples of remuneration were given e.g. for electricians, this was 1 shilling/hour.

The Military Service Act 1916 would have the effect of restricting selection for BRC in that any male declared fit and under the age of 40 years would be expected to be available for army service selection.

Paul showed one group to Chauffeur Philip Henry Webster which included a Meritorious Service Medal [MSM]. He'd been a night driver.



Above: Medals to Philip Henry Webster MSM

The BRC ['Salvation Army'] personnel cards typically have much more detail re: a volunteer's service e.g. 'Boulogne SA' and would include rates of pay between 28-35 shillings/week. Such information is not available on medal index cards ['MIC'].

There was also a 'touring car section' whose function was to identify and locate the missing and wounded. Working in this department was Chauffeur John William Sims MBE – His medals included an Italian War Merit Cross. His Civilian MBE was for work in the Boulogne Missing Personnel department up to 1920.



Above left: Medal group to John William Sims MBE [civil]. On the right is the Italian War Merit Cross.

Above right: WWI Pair to Despatch Rider Arthur Sheldon Kent.

Next up were the British War Medal and Victory pair to despatch rider Arthur Sheldon Kent aged 16 years. He was based at Boulogne and responsibilities included delivery of messages, telegrams and supplies.

Paul then talked about the First Aid Nursing Yeomanry [FANY] – They had first approached the British Army with their offer of service and had been declined – they subsequently went to the Belgian authorities and had been welcomed.

Dr Elsie Ingles a Scottish surgeon [and a suffragette] formed the 'Scottish Women's Hospital' – They worked from a converted convent in Royaumont, near Paris treating the French injured. Working there was Isabel Banks whose medals are shown below.



Above: Pair to Chauffeuse Isabel Banks.

In 1916, the FANY ran a 'Calais convoy' which served with British, Belgian and French armies – the Voluntary Aid Detachment [VAD] offered opportunities for women at 'Etretat' and also at 'Le Treport'.



Above left: Chauffeur/Mechanic John Maxwell [MID] Motor Ambulance convoy garage at Le Treport.

Above right: Pair and Belgian Queen Elisabeth medal to Chauffeuse Isabel Shorthouse, Le Treport Motor Ambulance Convoy. The Red Cross in the suspension wreath of the Belgian medal indicated specifically service in the care of the wounded.

Some injured were transported in hospital barges – these had been converted and their comforts included lifts – Ambulance trains transported the wounded – WWI Medal pair to Robert Turnbull [BRC Ambulance train No 17] was shown.

Also shown was a photo of a chauffeuse at Etaples 1917 – This was a hospital near Boulogne funded by the Canadian Red Cross. Etaples was bombed in April 1917 – an incident where four Military Medals ['MM'] were won.

The VAD had responsibility for transport of the deceased to the cemetery – there were sometimes six burials daily. Paul showed a poignant photograph of a burial scene.

The medals to Reverend Thomas William Thirlwell OBE working at Church Army Hospital, Caen [for the French Red Cross] were shown. [Pictured below – OBE with military ribbon].



The 'St Omer' convoy gave important service on 3.7.1918 after an air raid on an ammunition dump – during the bombing, the initial Ambulance vehicle response was destroyed – The FANY's drove in to rescue the injured. A total of sixteen MMs were awarded.

Also shown were medals to FANY Winifred Luther a WWI pair and Croix de Guerre. She'd assisted at the evacuation of wounded from a cinema which had been bombed – Of the 150 injured soldiers inside the cinema before the bombing, there were some 60 dead and further injuries amongst the survivors.



Above: WWI pair and Croix de Guerre to Chauffeuse Winifred Luther.

Finally, there was mention of the 'Hackett-Lowther' ambulance group – this was an independent all women group of ambulance drivers set up in 1917 by Norah Hackett and Toupie Lowther – they had offered their services to and became incorporated into the French Army with permission to operate close to the front. Many sportswomen featured in the group. Paul showed photographs of 6 members being presented with the Croix de Guerre in July 1918 and another photo of their ambulance vehicle was shown with the Croix de Guerre image on the side panel – they were held in high esteem.

Dave Walters then showed a WWI pair with Croix de Guerre that he'd been invited to buy recently – They were awarded to local Kidderminster man Chauffeur Percy Wimbush – With the medals came a folder of original supporting original documentation indicating he'd served in Service Sanitaire Anglaise 1 ['SSA 1']. The citation for the Croix de Guerre [17.7.1917] stated:

'He has been at the front since October 1915. He has always provided an assured service in a faultless manner – particularly noted was his zest and courage at Champagne 15-31.5.1917 frequently crossing zones of intense bombardment'.



Above: WWI pair and Croix de Guerre to Chauffeur Percy Wimbush SSA1.

This was a particularly good interactive meeting. President Roger Bragger thanked our speaker for an excellent talk and all others for their contributions.

C Davies 23.3.19