BIRMINGHAM MEDAL SOCIETY MEETING THURSDAY 2nd NOVEMBER 2017

The President opened the meeting with 16 members present.

Apologies were received from: Paul Murray, Mark Platt, Roy Painter, Chris Burns, Pat Knight & Bill Walton.

Research Questions: Martin Harrison raised an issue he had recently experienced with the MODMO. With some medal groups he had, with permission of the recipients NoK been able to claim medals or at least identify which awards they were entitled to. However with a recent RAF enquiry they had refused to cooperate or provide any details, dealing directly with family concerned. He was concerned about the apparent differences in interpretations from MODMO staff.

The President then introduced the topic for the evening Russia 1917-20. The evening was split into three parts 1. North Russian Campaign – Martin Harrison. 2. South Russian Campaign – John Scott. 3. Members medals relating to the topic.

Martin Harrison introduced the North Russian Campaign backed up by powerpoint. He covered Russia's entry into WWI, the growing discontent in the country, the revolution and slaughter of the Tsar and his family and finally the North Russian intervention. *(See below for a fuller description).* He finished by showing a World War I pair and photograph album belonging to Aircraftsman 1st Class Sidney White RAF.

John Scott then followed with a presentation and powerpoint on the South Russian Campaign. *(Full details awaited).*

Following the main speakers, the following showed groups connected to the Russian Campaigns of 1917-20.

PAUL HANDFORD - showed a group he had acquired in 2009 but had completed little research. They were to a Chauffeur in the BRC WWI Pair & Masonic St John medallion to Albert Ernest Dickinson, who was aged 50 when WWI started. With the group had come a lot of paperwork and ephemera including Albert's passport. Albert had served at the Anglo Russian Hospital in Petrograd with the Red Cross. It was known as the 'forgotten hospital' and 'The (British) Empire's Gift to Our Russian Allies' . It was founded in 1915 and closed in 1918 after the revolution and the staff evacuated to England. The hospital had formerly been the Dmitri Palace, and still exists as the Beloselsky-Belozersky Palace. An interesting group and one which Paul will now research further his interest having been aroused by tonight's subject.

JOHN BARKER - Showed a CBE, 1914-15 Trio with MiD, IGS 'NWF 1930-31' 1935 Silver Jubilee and Order of St Vladimir awarded to Gp Capt John Oliver Archer. He served in South Russia during the campaign in command of Z Flight. He had been on the train with his aircraft heading north towards Moscow the aircraft being constructed when the train stopped about 200 miles from the city. Archer is mentioned in the book titled *The Day We Almost Bombed Moscow* and he was waiting for orders to do just that. However he was ordered to withdraw in April 1920, and the operation became a 'hidden' one for political reasons. He was awarded the CBE for services in Russia. He served inter-war and retired from the RAF in 1935. He was recalled during WWII serving the Reserve of RAF Officers and awarded the Defence Medal and War Medal 1939-45.

REG COOK - Showed a group to Sydney Kiln. Africa General Service Medal 'Somaliland 1902-04'. 1914 Star & clasp trio and Long Service & Good Conduct Medal – Sydney was a Sapper in the Royal Engineers, and held the same rank throughout his entire service. He served in the BEF and entered France on 4th October 1914. He was a Carpenter and became a 1st Rate Wheeler. He also served in the North Russian Campaign.

KEN WESTON - was last to speak but his group was not related to Russia! He showed a WWI trio in a frame to Pte T H Smith RMLI. Smith had been born and bred in Birmingham although illegitimate. Ken ran through Smith's family background and explained he had on board a RN ship that was sunk by U22 and had been returned to the UK. He was also serving in HMS Indomitable during the Battle of Jutland in May 1916.

The President thanked all the speakers and closed the meeting allowing time for members to view the various groups.

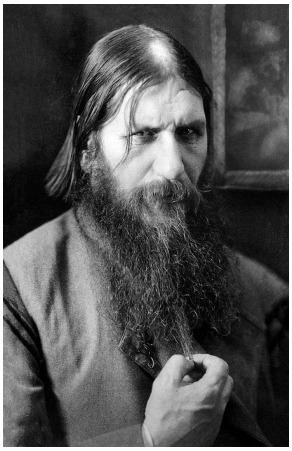
The next meeting is Thursday 7th December 2017 – recent Acquisitions, Mini Lecturettes and Members Bring & Buy.

MARTIN HARRISON – NORTH RUSSIA

A show of national unity accompanied Russia's entry into the war, with defence of the Slavic Serbs the main battle cry. Initially Russia's offensives into East Prussia drew enough German troops from the western front to allow the French, Belgians, and British to stop the German advance.

Early successes turned to disaster at the Battle of Tannenberg in late August 1914 and they lost almost their entire 2nd Army, and saw them driven out of Prussia completely. In Austria-Hungary, Russia was enjoying greater success which ultimately led to the capture of the capital Galicia. From there, the Southern Russia army began to proceed with its plans and push on towards Poland.

Tsar Nicholas II was spurred on by a romantic vision to lead his own army and that misguided notion saw him leave and spend an undue amount of time at the Eastern Front. In turn, that left the Tsarina who fell under the hypnotic spell of Rasputin. With Nicholas away, he was left free to exert the kind of influence that brought disrepute crashing down onto the Romanov's.



Rasputin

Russia's last great contribution to World War 1 came in May 1916 with a vast line of operations from Pinsk in Belorussia right down to the German border with Southern Romania. The Russian army inflicted heavy losses on the enemy but their line of resistance held.

Back in Russia and by the beginning of February 1917, the domestic troubles were rapidly coming to a conclusion with unrest, disobedience and strikes becoming widespread. Rasputin virtually running the country and a weak and indecisive Tsar isolated on the Eastern front.

On March 12th, those in a bread queue in St Petersburg, spurred on by the cold and hunger, charged a bakery. The police fired on them in an effort to restore order. It was to prove a very costly error for the government as around 100,000 were out on the streets on strike & quickly supported those fired on.

Local Regiments joined the strikers and used their might to disarm the police. The city's arsenal was opened and prisoners freed from prisons that were later burned. What had been a small disturbance at a city baker's, had turned into a full-scale rebellion.

On March 13th, more soldiers were ordered on to the streets to dispel the strikers. They saw the size of the crowds and returned to their barracks, thus disobeying their orders. This was coupled with desertions & mutinies at the front.

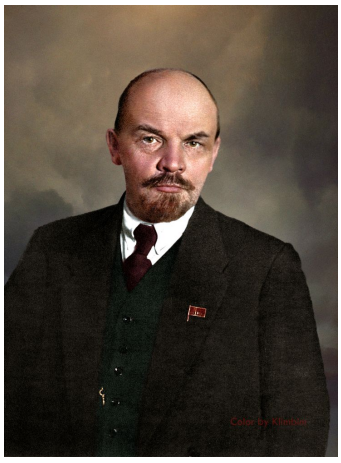
Alexander Kerensky

The Duma appointed a provisional committee, which was representative of all parties led by Alexander Kerensky. The Tsar was persuaded to abdicate and gave up all his titles and honours he and family placed under protective custody. This became known as the February Revolution.

This was followed by The October Revolution, conducted by the Bolsheviks (literally the majority) led by the Vladimir Lenin. It followed and capitalized on the February Revolution and urban workers began to organize into councils (*Soviets*) who worked against the provisional government. The Soviets elected members of the Bolsheviks and other leftist groups to important positions which initiated the establishment of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic, the world's first self-proclaimed socialist state.

On 17 July 1918, the Tsar and his family were brutally slain at Ekaterinburg on Lenin's order.

The Bolsheviks used their influence in the Petrograd Soviet to organize the armed forces. Bolshevik Red Guards forces under the Military Revolutionary Committee began the occupation of government buildings and in November the Winter Palace (the seat of the Provisional government located in Petrograd) was captured. As the revolution was not universally recognized, there followed the struggles of the Russian Civil War (1917–22)



Lenin

Like any country's story, the one of Russia in WW1 was a sad and devastating one. At the end of the conflict, they had suffered heavy losses with claims of up to two and a half million fatalities being recorded. It was also economic tragedy with millions of rubles in war debt crippling the nation leaving legacy for many years. Clearly, the period from 1914 – 1918 was pivotal for Russia for many reasons.

Archangel Oblast

The North Russia Intervention, Aka Northern Russian Expedition, Archangel Campaign, & the Murman Deployment, was part of the Allied Intervention in Russia after the October Revolution.

The intervention brought about a campaign involving foreign troops in the Russian Civil War on the side of the White movement, a loose confederation of Anti-Communist forces that fought the Bolsheviks and lasted from 1918, during the final months of World War I, to 1920.

Following the February revolution the Russian Provisional Government pledged to continue fighting Germany on the Eastern Front. In return, the U.S. began providing economic and technical support to the Russian provisional government, so they could carry out their military pledge.

The Russian offensive of 18 June 1917, was crushed by a German counteroffensive and we've heard the Russian Army was plagued by mutinies and desertions & Allied war material still in transit quickly began piling up in warehouses at Archangel and the ice-free port of Murmansk.

Anxious to keep Russia in the war, the Royal Navy established the British North Russia Squadron.

In March 1918 Lenin signed the Treaty of Brest-Litovsk with Germany, which formally ended the war on the Eastern Front. This allowed the German army to begin redeploying troops to the Western Front, where the depleted British and French armies had not yet been bolstered by the American Expeditionary Force.

In April 1918 a division of German troops landed in Finland, creating fears they might try to capture the Murmansk–Petrograd railroad, Murmansk Port and possibly even the city of Arkhangel. Also fighting between the Czechoslovak Legion & Russia in May 1918, led the British & French governments to begin their intervention in North Russia.

They had three objectives:

1 Hoped to prevent the Allied war materiel stockpiles in Archangel from falling into German or Bolshevik hands.
2. To mount an offensive to rescue the Czechoslovak Legion, which was stranded along the Trans-Siberian Railroad and resurrect the Eastern Front.

3. By defeating the Bolshevik army with the assistance of the Czechoslovak Legion and to expand anti-communist forces drawn from the local citizenry.

In July 1918, the US begrudgingly agreed to a limited participation in the campaign by a contingent of soldiers of the 339th Infantry Regiment,

The British 6th Battalion Royal Marines Light Infantry was scratched together from a company of the Royal Marine Artillery and companies from each of the three naval port depots. Very few of their officers had seen any land fighting. Many of the Marines were less than 19 years old; Others ex-prisoners of war who had only recently returned from Germany and had no home leave.

There was outrage when on short notice, the 6th Battalion was shipped to Murmansk, Russia, on the Arctic Ocean. Still not expecting to have to fight, the battalion was ordered forward under army command to hold certain outposts.

The forces in North Russia included:

- A British Navy Flotilla of over 20 ships – including two seaplane carriers; HMS *Pegasus* and HMS *Nairana*
- The 45th and 46th Battalions of the Royal Fusiliers
- Approximately 8,000 United States Army soldiers
- 14 Battalions of British Commonwealth troops – Canadian Brigade and Australian Infantry,
- 2,000 French, Colonial & Engineers,
- 1,000 British-Serbian and Polish
- A British Royal Air Force contingent comprising Airco DH.4 bombers, Fairey Campania and Sopwith Babyseaplanes along with a single Sopwith Camel fighter.

Opposing this international force was the Seventh and Eighth Red Army.

In September 1918, the Allies took Obozerskaya, around 100 miles south of Archangel. During the attack, the RAF provided air support to the advancing Allied infantry, conducting bombing and strafing runs.

On 28 Aug 18 the RMLI was ordered to seize the village of Koikori from the Bolsheviks as part of a wide offensive into East Karelia to secure the British withdrawal to Murmansk.

The attack was disorganized and three Marines killed and 18 wounded, including the battalion commander who had ineffectually led the attack himself. A week later, B and C companies, led this time by a Major, made a second attempt to take Koikori, while D company was involved in an attack on the village of Ussuna. The British were again repulsed at Koikori; the army major was killed and both Marine company commanders wounded. D company was also beaten off by Bolshevik forces around Ussuna, with the death of the battalion adjutant, killed by sniper fire.

The next morning, faced with the prospect of another attack on the village, one Marine company refused to obey orders and withdrew themselves to a nearby friendly village. Ninety-three men from the battalion were court-martialled; 13 were sentenced to death and others received substantial sentences of hard labour. In December 1919, the Government, under pressure from several MPs, revoked the sentence of death and considerably reduced the sentence of all the convicted men.

Heavy fighting followed, and as Bolshevik attacks became more sustained the Allies' previous gains had shrunk by 19–31 miles during the next 4 months. A steady withdrawal was made from September 1918 and fierce fighting took place on Armistice Day 1918 at the Battle of Tulgas; The Kurgomin–Tulgas line the final defensive line in 1919. Trotsky as Commander in Chief of the Red Army personally supervised this task on the orders of Lenin.

An international policy to support the White Russians and, in Winston Churchill's words, "to strangle at birth the Bolshevik State" became increasingly unpopular in Britain. In January 1919 the *Daily Express* was echoing public opinion when, it exclaimed, "the frozen plains of Eastern Europe are not worth the bones of a single grenadier".

From April 1919, the inability to hold the flanks and mutinies in the ranks of the White Russian forces caused the Allies to decide to leave. A number of western military advisers were killed by White mutineers who went over to the Bolsheviks and the Allies were forced to retreat.

Minor operations to keep open a line of withdrawal against the 7th Red Army as far south as Lake Onega and Yomtsa River to the east took place along the Arkhangel Railway with an armoured train manned by the Americans. The last major battle fought by the Americans before their departure took place at Bolshie Ozerki from 31 March through 4 April 1919.

SIDNEY WHITE RAF

Sidney White (with X) and his 1914-19 British War & Victory Medals with MiD

This group of medals were acquired from an old friend Eric Hall, on a part exchange basis for £4.00 on 7th July 1978. They caused some excitement at the time, as there was a photograph album with the medals showing the recipient in Russia. One of the pictures had an ink cross above one of the Airmen and it was believed this may have been S White.

Additionally the medals came with a Mention in Despatches emblem, which over the years was never confirmed, even with the onset of internet research and trawling the London Gazette; further research was also limited as there are a lot of S Whites on Ancestry.UK, and no detail found.

On a visit to TNA in May 2013, it was decided to finally undertake some serious research on S White as he had sat in the collection for 35 years with nothing being done. Within five minutes of arrival, having checked the archives it was established that S White's first name was Sidney!

Within the hour his original World War I Royal Air Force service record was available and gave sufficient information to allow further cross checking on Ancestry.UK, enabling a brief biography of Sidney White to be pieced together, with possible further potential.

Crucially, Sidney's RAF record confirmed he had served in Russia, proving beyond reasonable doubt that the photograph album was his. It also confirmed that he had indeed been awarded a Mention in Despatches, thus fully confirming the provenance of the group.

After further painstaking search through the London Gazette and eventually finding the correct combination of words, Sidney's MiD was located there too, and he has the distinction of being the last member of the RAF to be recognised in the London Gazette in connection with the War!

An interesting fact is that Sidney died in the first quarter of 1975, and the group only acquired from Eric Hall three years later in 1978, at that time a very 'recent acquisition'. One wonders if it was possible that Eric had known Sidney or his family, but having passed the medals onto me did not wish to disclose the fact?

Sidney White was born on 14 May 1889 in Maidstone, Kent, Son of Henry Elias a Borough Police Officer and Ellen Sharlotte.

He was one of three children, Ellen Caroline born in 1894 and Henry James born 1897. By 1901 the family were living at 57 John Street, Maidstone.

Ten years later in 1911 they were still at the same address although a note appended to the census by Henry senior, next to Henry juniors name says *"Feeble minded from 2 years of age and is at the present time in the Earlswood Asylum, Redhill, Surrey."*

Sidney however aged 12 was now at school, and after leaving became a Cabinet Maker.

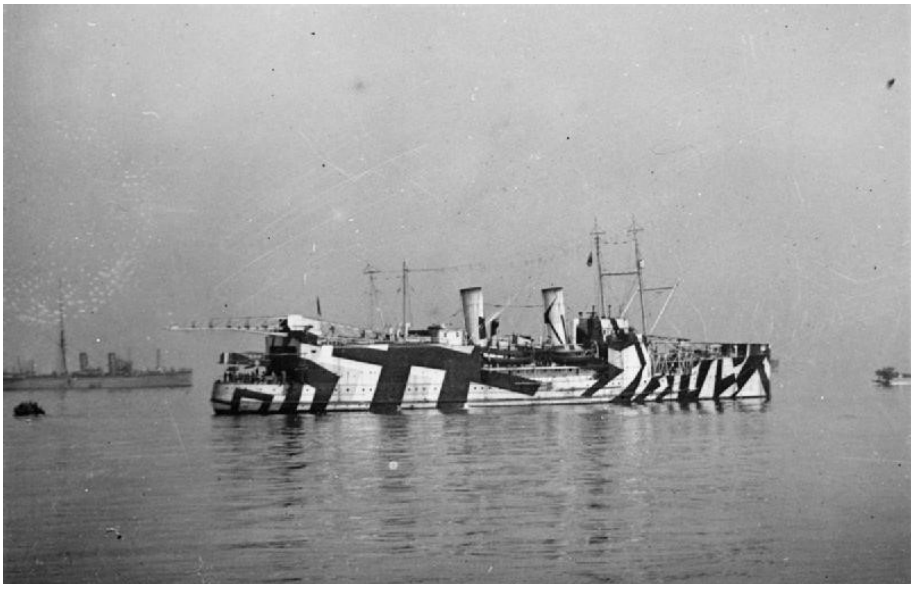
On 23rd August 1917, aged 28 enlisted into the Royal Naval Air Service as an Air Mechanic (Aero Rigger), in HMS President II – which was a shore establishment and an accounting base, based at times at Chatham, Crystal Palace, Chingford and Shrewsbury and was extant between 1916 and at least 1947.

He was described as 5'.6½ "tall, with dark hair, blue eyes and a sallow complexion with a scar over his left eyebrow. His religion was given as Church of England.

Following his enlistment Sidney served in His Majesty's Ships Daedalus from Aug 1917 to Jan 18 (Daedalus was the RNAS Shore establishment now known as RAF Cranwell) and President again from Jan until 31Mar.

On 1st April 1918 he transferred into the newly formed Royal Air Force with service number 236178, initially based at Stonehenge he moved to RAF Halton in June 1919.

On 4th July 1919, Sidney was posted to the Russian Front, in Murmansk as part of the North Russian Expeditionary Force and RAF Syren Force where he was shipped in HMS Nairana.



HMS Nairana

Whilst serving in North Russia Sidney was Mentioned in Despatches and awarded the oak leaf emblem.

Following the decision to withdraw allied troops from Russia Sidney had to wait until October 1919 when he was returned to the UK and posted to Donibraith and then Purfleet. On 4 Feb 20 he was transferred to the RAF G Reserve. He was awarded the 1914-18 British War and Victory Medals. Little extra detail is known of Sidney's later life except that he died in Maidstone, Kent during the first quarter of 1975 aged 86.

Google Martin Harrison Room 405 and click on Sidney White for more information and pictures from the Photograph Album