



Lieutenant Colonel T.E. Lawrence and driver Corporal J. McKechnie, Army Service Corps (ASC), sitting in "Blue Mist," Marjeh Square, Damascus, Oct 2, 1918.

Image © Rolls-Royce plc

## Solving The Mystery of Blue Mist: "Lawrence's Rolls-Royce"

by James Stejskal © 2017

*One evening in August 2016, three gentlemen were discussing Rolls Royce history, each silently contemplating the virtues of the wine they were drinking. It's not clear which they enjoyed more, the cars, the company, or the wine, but they soon discovered there was a mystery common to them all. It was a mystery each was eager to solve. That mystery was the identity of the car used by Lawrence of Arabia to enter Damascus on October 1, 1918 - Blue Mist.*

*This article is the result of that discussion and research done by: Tom Clarke, a Rolls-Royce motoring historian of note; Philip Walker, an author & historian specializing in personalities of the Arab Revolt – both from the UK; and two "Yanks" – Pierce Reid, a master Rolls-Royce mechanic and military historian; and James Stejskal, a military historian & conflict archaeologist specializing in unconventional warfare.*

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The photograph shows a tired man, Lieutenant Colonel Thomas Edward Lawrence - more commonly known as

Lawrence of Arabia,<sup>1</sup> sitting in the passenger seat of an equally tired car. He is dressed in an Arab cloak and headdress. The

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<sup>1</sup> The image is courtesy of the Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust.

driver next to him, Army Service Corps (ASC) Corporal J. McKechnie, wears threadbare and dirty British khaki. They are parked in Marjeh Square in Damascus.<sup>2</sup> It is October 1918 and the end of Great War in the Ottoman Empire is very near.

The car is a Rolls-Royce Silver Ghost, but it is not the elegant car it once was. Rather, it appears to be a common utility vehicle with open bodywork and a carry-all bed behind the seats. Extra tires and tubes are strapped to the sides and a canvas water bucket hangs from the exposed firewall. The fenders<sup>2</sup> are dented and bent, lights are missing, the paintwork is sandblasted. The car has, in cavalry parlance, been run hard and put away wet.

But, just as the man wasn't just any soldier, this wasn't just any car. This was "Blue Mist," one of about ten Rolls-Royces that comprised the Hejaz Armoured Car Battery (HACB). The picture was taken the day after Damascus had been captured by the Australians.

If "the car makes the man" then it is appropriate that one of the most famous photographs of Lawrence of Arabia shows him sitting in a Rolls-Royce. It was Lawrence, after all, who said: "A Rolls in the desert was above rubies..."<sup>3</sup>

Lawrence of Arabia is well-known. His many biographers have described, extolled, or deprecated him in numerous books. His identity is certain, although his personality remains enigmatic.

Not so the car; its origin was unknown. Its identity remained a tantalizing mystery. Until now.

Why should we care about a car? It is, after all, a machine, a tool, a piece of equipment designed to serve a purpose then be tossed out or replaced when it wears out. Or is it part of the history of the epoch that shaped the Middle East into what it is today? Only recently did a group of researchers decide to seriously pursue the mystery of Blue Mist's identity as a small piece of the history of Lawrence and the Arab Revolt.

Tom Clarke started his quest for Blue Mist about 1995, while he was indexing the book *The Edwardian Rolls-Royce* by John Fasal and Bryan K. Goodman. He was pushed into action by a query from Ray Millington (of New South Wales) who had done much preliminary research without ever being able to crack the car's identity. Ray's work set the stage for Tom. Pierce Reid, another Lawrence scholar, just wanted to know, while I started my search after working on two Great Arab Revolt Project archaeological expeditions to Jordan. Finding artifacts of the Rolls-Royce armoured cars at a camp fueled my interest in the history of the HACB and Blue Mist. Until our meeting in August 2016, each of us was pursuing Blue Mist on separate

tracks. Together we vowed to find her identity no later than the centenary of the end of the Great War - November 2018.

At the beginning, only a few clues to Blue Mist's origins existed. There was the famous photo described earlier, the car's name from Lawrence's *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, and comments by Lawrence's contemporaries: Major Francis Stirling, DSO, Corporal Sam Cottingham Rolls, and the American journalist Lowell Jackson Thomas.

From these sources we knew that Blue Mist was unlike the other Rolls-Royce cars of the HACB, which were all 1914 40/50 models, known as "Silver Ghosts."<sup>4</sup> More specifically, they were a special, high performance modification that came out of the 1912 Austrian Alpine Trial. The cars were equipped with a four-speed transmission (up from three) and a 7428cc engine producing 75bhp (up from 60) courtesy of a raised compression ratio and larger carburetor. Officially they were



*The Hejaz Armoured Cars tender "Blue Mist" in the Wadi Itm.*

"Continental" models, but they are better known by the more evocative "Alpine Eagle" nickname given them by Rolls-Royce engineer and test driver, Ernest Hives.

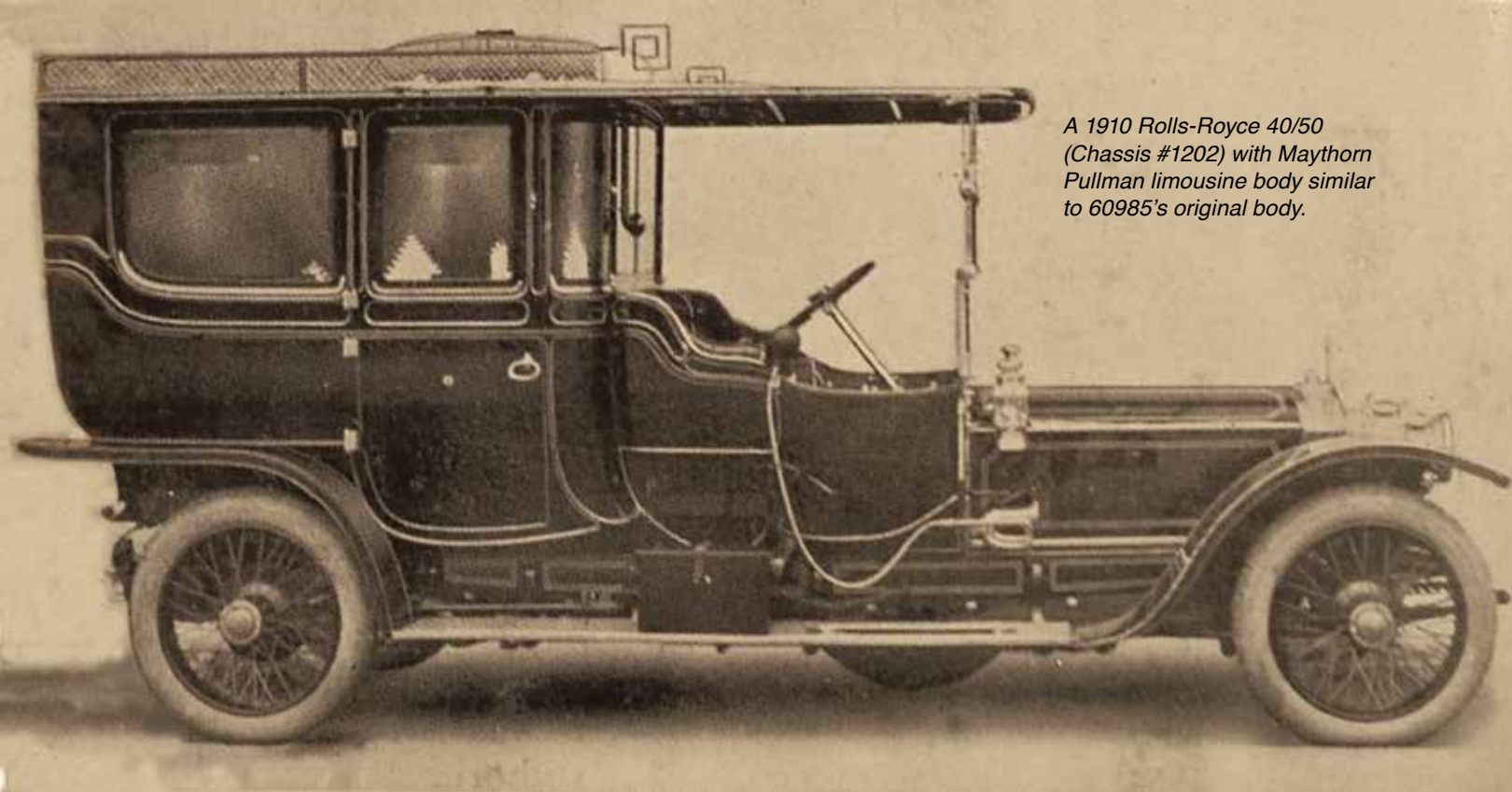
### **How did a Rolls-Royce end up in the Desert?**

When the need for armoured cars arose at the beginning of World War I, chassis from several manufacturers were adapted for the military's use. Very quickly, Rolls-Royce's Silver Ghost

<sup>2</sup> T/N: known as 'wings' in the UK.

<sup>3</sup> T.E. Lawrence, *Seven Pillars of Wisdom: A Triumph - The Complete 1922 Text*, Editor: Jeremy Wilson, (Salisbury: Castle Hill Press, 2012), 720.

<sup>4</sup> The 40/50 cars were known collectively as "Silver Ghosts" only after 1925. The first 40/50 to be named "Silver Ghost" was a 1907 chassis number 60551.



A 1910 Rolls-Royce 40/50 (Chassis #1202) with Maythorn Pullman limousine body similar to 60985's original body.

Edwardian Rolls-Royce, J.M. Fasal & Bryan Goodman (authors/publishers), Vol. 1, p. 284.

proved to be one of the most rugged and reliable, largely due to its exceptional engineering and robust construction. Amazingly, although the armoured versions were carrying two additional tonnes of 3/8" steel plate, the only modifications were several extra spring leaves front and rear, a four-gallon reserve petrol tank, and counter-balance weights on the crankshaft to add mass and increase torque. On a good day, on a smooth road, and with the wind at your back, the 4-tonne armoured cars could reach 60 mph!<sup>5</sup> The car was designated as the "Admiralty Pattern II" because they were originally designed for the Royal Navy's Armoured Car Division.

Looking like a truck with large tuna-fish can on top, the Rolls-Royce armoured cars were outfitted with a Maxim-Vickers medium .303 caliber machine-gun mounted in a 360° swiveling turret. Several thousand rounds of ammunition loaded into cloth belts were stowed inside the vehicle and there were usually two Enfield rifles inside for the crew if things got really tight. Entry into the car was through two doors in the back of the crew compartment. The crew was protected by an armoured plate across the front windscreen with two narrow vision slits, however, their backsides were not so well protected as they sat on simple cushions laid directly on the floor of the car. The engine compartment was protected by armor all around and two mechanically operated steel doors protected the radiator when the car went into action. Finally, double wheels and tyres on the rear axle completed the modifications. The cars would be given double front wheels after they arrived

in the Hejaz, which improved their abilities in deep sand and incidentally provided redundancy when tires were punctured by rocks or Turkish gunfire.

Several of the cars were later "down armoured" in a military depot outside Cairo, Egypt to serve as support vehicles or "tenders" to the armoured cars even before they were shipped to the Hejaz.<sup>6</sup> The armour was removed and a simple wood body with an open bed was fitted. The tenders were needed to carry extra men, fuel, water, and supplies - boxes of gold sovereigns from the Australian Mint, additional machine-guns, and high explosives - required for operations. Their heavier brothers had room for little beyond two crewmen, ammunition, and a machine-gun. Additionally, the Rolls-Royce tenders were the only vehicles that could keep pace with the armoured cars.

A few Rolls-Royces were appropriated from their civilian owners during the war. Some were older models (pre-1914) and most retained their custom bodies and refined appointments.<sup>7</sup> They served such luminaries as Generals Douglas Haig in France and Edmund Allenby in Egypt as well as King George V during his visits to the Western Front. But not all the Rolls had such posh VIP duty; "Blue Mist" fell into this latter group.

#### **But First: The Arab Revolt**

In June 1916, Sherif Hussein launched the Arab Revolt with a rifle shot fired from the balcony of his home in Mecca. He had long plotted his people's escape from the oppressive Ottoman Empire, as well as his own rule over the Hejaz. He acted when

5 A Tender topped out at 70 mph, according to S.C. Rolls, one of the drivers.

6 "Tender" is the naval term for a support vessel and, as they started out with the Royal Navy's Armoured Car Division, it is an appropriate name for the cars. The cars were sometimes also called "Battery" cars.

7 Some were converted to ambulances and served in the European Theater.



he learned the Turks intended to preempt his plans and remove him from his post as guardian of the Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina. His revolt was seen by many in Britain, India, and especially France, as a complication to their plans to exploit the region after the war. British military and political leaders in Cairo and Khartoum, however, thought it would help defeat the Turks and began working to support the uprising. The revolt would, for the most part, be carried out by local troops, as the introduction of “infidel” British or French soldiers would have negative consequences for Hussein’s leadership.

In late 1916, the British Military Mission began to directly advise and provide training to the Arabs - beyond the weapons and gold already provided Hussein “indirectly” from Port



J. Stejskal ©2017

*Remains of the Hejaz rail line as it descends from the plateau down into the Batn el Ghoul (Belly of the Beast) to the lower desert south of Ma’an, Jordan*

Sudan.<sup>8</sup> In the beginning, the revolt’s military objectives were to interfere with the Hejaz railway, the principal supply line to the Turkish stronghold at Medina, and to capture that city. Hussein’s forces were already in possession of Mecca. But Hussein was the spiritual, not military, leader of the revolt. His sons would be the field commanders.

On a “fact-finding” trip to the region with Reginald Storrs, Oriental Secretary to the British Agency in Cairo, T.E. Lawrence, then an Acting Captain with Military Intelligence, met Hussein’s four sons and determined that Faisal was the one best suited to lead the revolt’s military operations. When Lawrence reported his estimate to his superiors, he was assigned to Faisal’s camp to provide him military counsel and report intelligence back to the Arab Bureau in Cairo. In December

1916, Captain Lawrence became the Principal Liaison Officer to Faisal, who commanded the Arab Northern Army that would play a pivotal role in the revolt.

In March 1917, while in the fever dreams of debilitating sickness, Lawrence devised a strategy for the continuation of the campaign. He realized the Arabs were incapable of confronting the Ottoman-Turk Army directly. He also realized that taking Medina would accomplish nothing beyond relieving the Turkish high command of the responsibility to supply it. Lawrence thought it better to keep the city surrounded to tie up the enemy’s resources.

The Arabs would do what they did best as Bedouin raiders: hit-and-run tactics. They would strike Turkish outposts suddenly and violently from out of the desert and, just as quickly, disappear back into it. The Turks dared not follow. This would be the Revolt’s signature for the next year and a half.

Mobility, along with intelligence, would be key. And, at first, the Bedouins’ skill with camels was almost enough to carry out their operations. Before long, however, the difficulties of fighting a larger and better equipped force became apparent. If they were to fulfill General Sir Edmund Allenby’s wish that they be his “right wing” as the Allies fought in the Sinai and Palestine, the Arabs would require more assistance. More military aid was sent - airplanes to conduct aerial reconnaissance, advisors to teach demolitions, along with Muslim troops provided by the Allies. Eventually, even 500 British and Commonwealth Cameliers of the Imperial Camel Corps assisted the Arab Revolt. British armoured cars and French and British artillery would work directly with the Arabs in their operations.

### **The Armoured Motors**

The first “armoured motors” - two modified Rolls-Royce 40/50s - to join the Arab Revolt were landed at the port of Rabegh in November 1916 to provide local security for the BMM’s logistics and its tiny Royal Flying Corps (RFC) operations.<sup>9</sup> Little has been recorded of their activities and they most likely did not venture very far inland because of the difficult terrain. Rabegh was near Mecca and well-placed to support operations near there, but the port was too far to the south to expand the revolt northward towards Damascus. To accommodate that aim, the port of Wejh, further to the north, was captured with the help of the Royal Navy’s Red Sea Patrol.

Having been impressed by the armoured cars, a never shy Faisal asked for four more cars and some artillery.

In early 1917, he received two additional Rolls-Royce armoured cars, which were landed at Wejh. These were the first of the Hedjaz Armoured Car Section (later Battery) under the command of Lieutenants Leofric H. Gilman, MC and Ernest H. Wade, MC. They were detailed to protect the new British logistics base, part of the expanding British commitment to the revolt.

<sup>8</sup> General Sir Francis Reginald Wingate, *His Majesty’s Governor General of Sudan, was the one of the first proponents of the Arab Revolt and provided aid to Hussein from Port Sudan even before the revolt began in June 1916.*

<sup>9</sup> HVF Winstone, *The Diaries of Parker Pasha: The war in the desert 1914-1918 told through the secret diaries of Colonel Alfred Chevallier Parker*, (London, Quartet Books, 1983), 131.



The new cars were identified by their military registration numbers as LC 0808 and LC 0809. As former members of the Royal Navy's No. 1 Armoured Car Squadron, they were well-traveled. They first participated in the 1915 conquest of German Southwest Africa. In late 1915, they were shipped to Dar es Salaam and employed against the venerable German guerrilla leader, Lieutenant Colonel Paul von Lettow-Vorbeck. However, the heavy cars had trouble with the mud of East Africa and were eventually shipped off to Egypt where the terrain proved more suitable.

The crews had traveled to North Africa with the Duke of Westminster. At the beginning of the war, the Duke purchased the 12 armoured cars to equip Royal Navy No. 2 Armoured Car Squadron and he was thus entitled to lead it. He also brought his own Mulliner-bodied Silver Ghost tourer (chassis 46MA) as his command vehicle. The squadron spent the first months of the war in France until trench warfare rendered the cars of little use. Then they were sent to Egypt to fight pro-Ottoman Senussi tribesmen who were giving the British a bit of trouble in the western desert.<sup>10</sup> Once the Senussi were subdued, the Duke went back to England while his men awaited new orders. The men were experienced, although not in the guerrilla-style fighting they would be doing with Lawrence.

While at Wejeh, Lieutenant Gilman ventured out into the surrounding desert with his cars and crews. They gained valuable experience in negotiating the terrain and preparing the vehicles, but they did not go into action against the enemy - yet.

### Aqaba

Prince Faisal and Lawrence worked well together. Lawrence's linguistic skill and cultural acumen, along with a deep empathy for the Arab cause brought him trust that was probably accorded to no other British officer in equal measure. And it was Lawrence's counsel (as well as bags of gold sovereigns) that helped Faisal to build an alliance of tribes that would enable the advance north to Damascus - the revolt's end goal. Lawrence used that trust to convince Faisal that another base was needed. Lawrence's plan was to take the port city of Aqaba.

But Lawrence's strategy was in direct opposition to that advocated by his superior officers. The leadership in Cairo wanted the Arab Revolt to remain in the south and to concentrate its efforts against the garrison at Medina. Colonel Gilbert Falkingham Clayton, the senior intelligence officer in Cairo, felt that if the Arabs took Aqaba themselves, they actually might claim the place thereafter. He thought possession of Aqaba was key to the defense of Egypt and the Suez Canal and therefore the port should be in British hands.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>10</sup> *The Squadron was transferred to Army control in December 1915 before embarking for Egypt.*

<sup>11</sup> *Jeremy Wilson, Lawrence of Arabia, The Authorized Biography of T.E. Lawrence, (New York: Atheneum, 1989), 397.*



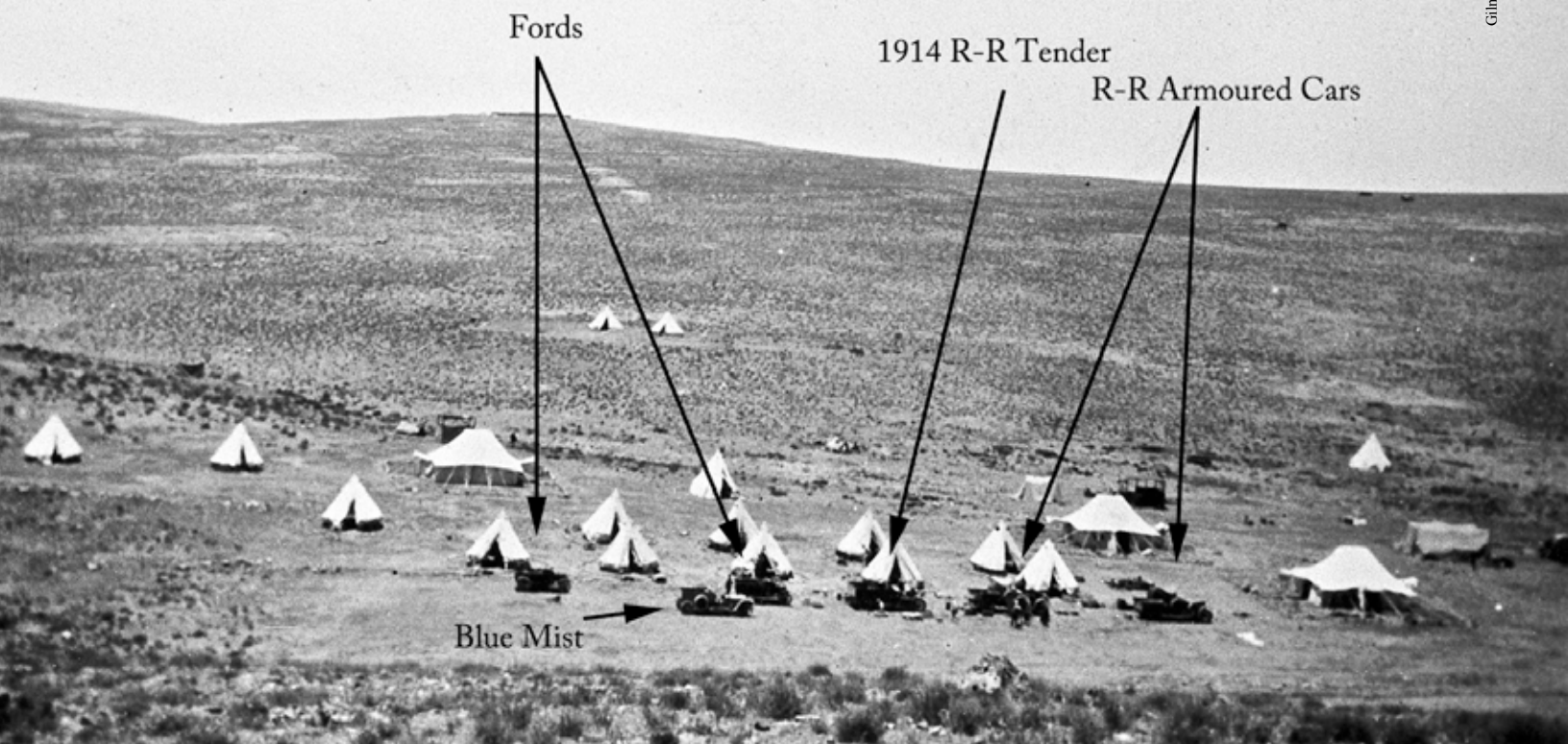
*Two Rolls-Royce Armoured Cars in the Hejaz. Armed with Maxim-Vickers .303 caliber machine guns, these cars provided a reliable and formidable mobile gun platform to the Arab Revolt.*



A 1914 Rolls Royce tender. LC 1105 loaded for operations with Colonel Alan Dawnay, Chief of Staff for Hedjaz Operations.



View of Hejaz Armoured Car Battery at Aba el Lissan Camp from hilltop with Blue Mist shown in the foreground.







(Left) Hejaz Armoured Car Battery at Aba el Lissan Camp (ground level)

One of the few remaining Ottoman-Turkish guard stations on the Hejaz railway about 45 kilometers south of Ma'an, Jordan.



J. Stejskal ©2017

Gilman Collection (AeL-04)

Rolls-Royce 40/50 "Alpine Eagle" chassis prior to armoring circa 1914. Note dual rear wheels, additional spring leaves, and auxiliary fuel tank behind fire-wall.



Unknown

Blue Mist, driven by Lieutenant Leofric Gilman, Commander of the HACB, shortly after its arrival at Aqaba. It has its original wooden artillery wheels front and rear.

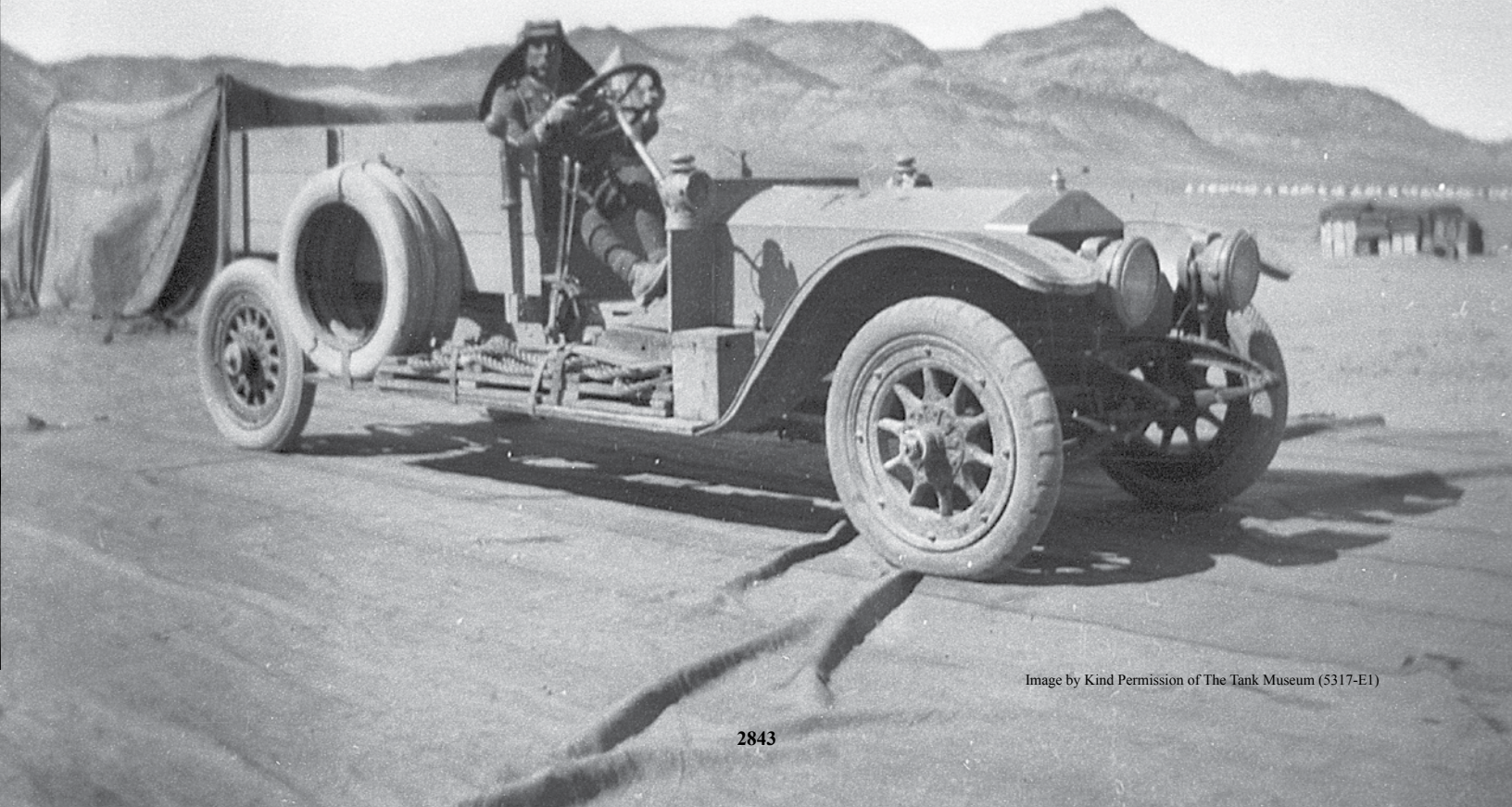
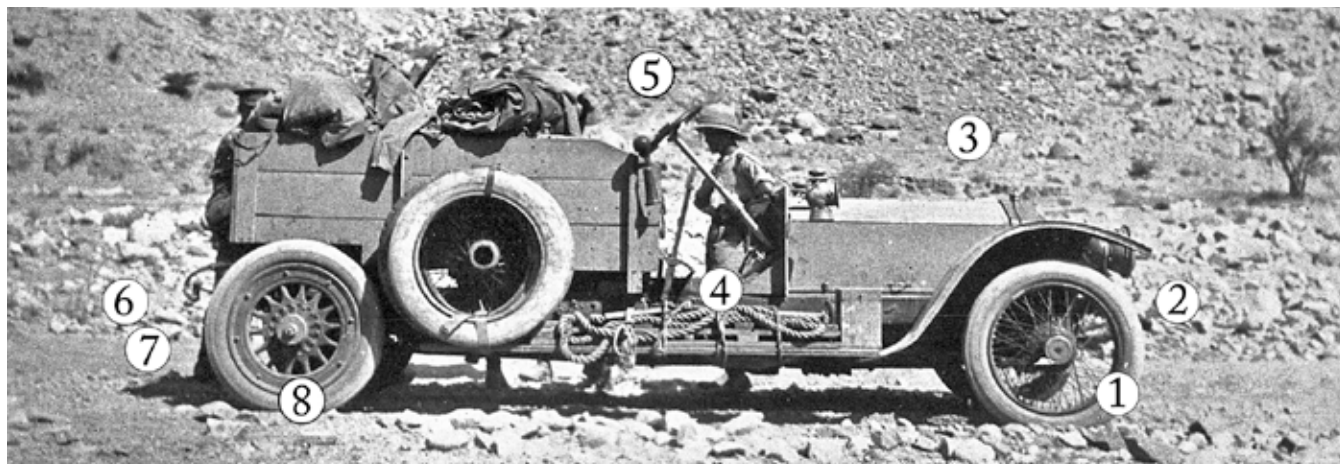


Image by Kind Permission of The Tank Museum (5317-E1)



## How the Chassis Number was Identified

1. Curved front axle - post-700 series and pre-1100 series, plus low engine mounting (See Damascus photo, page 2837)
2. Improved radiator mounting - indicates either a post-60920 car or an upgraded earlier car (See Damascus photo)
3. Parallel bonnet used until 1912 when tapered bonnets became more common and fashionable.
4. No steering cross-tube brace – means this was a formal car when new.
5. Open spider plate on steering wheel = post 60589, no ignition switch above the spider plate – pre-1400 series
6. No rear petrol tank so it's under the front seat = 60539 to 1015 (See Wadi Itm photo, page 2838)
7. 3/4 elliptic rear springs = 60588 to 2099 series; Rear rather than central pan on sump – post-60588 (See Wadi Itm photo)
8. Wooden artillery wheels – common on earlier cars



Gilman Collection (8779-C4)

Never one to toe the line, Lawrence secretly decided to go ahead with his plan before his superiors figured out what he was doing. Lawrence knew the difficulty of capturing Aqaba from the sea. The long, narrow defile of Wadi Itm would permit the Turks to easily defend against a landing from the sea. Instead, Lawrence and the warrior chieftain, Auda abu Tayi, planned an approach from the landward side. It would not be an easy mission. Although some Arab leaders had contemplated Aqaba's capture, it would not have been possible without the cooperation of many tribes working together or of others permitting the raiders to pass through their territory - their unity was a benefit of the trust Lawrence had earned and the gold he brought to the revolt.

After an eight-week, 300-mile expedition through the wastelands of the Hejaz, which succeeded in deceiving the Turks as to their true intentions, the Arabs and Lawrence surprised the Turkish garrison and captured Aqaba on July 6, 1917. Faisal was able to shift his base of operations north from Wejh. Handed a *fait accompli*, the British military leadership accepted Lawrence's strategy to let Medina remain a logistics albatross for the Turks. Lawrence was also promoted to Major.

The armoured cars at Wejh were shipped to Aqaba where they were soon joined by others of their kind. Several cars from the Duke of Westminster's demobilized squadron

were reassigned to the Army's HACB.<sup>12</sup> These were three armoured Rolls-Royces (LC 336, LC 339, and LC 340), plus two cars that had been stripped of their armour and outfitted with simple wood bodies. Each had an open bed for carrying supplies and would prove indispensable to operations. In naval parlance, these were called "tenders." These were LC 340 (chassis 57LB), known as "Blast," and LC 1105 (chassis 44LB), known as "Bloodhound."<sup>13</sup> Among the newcomers was a third tender, an older Rolls-Royce 40/50 built in 1909, called "Blue Mist."

A battery of two ancient 10-pounder breech loading cannon "screw" guns, made mobile by loading them onto the backs of Talbot trucks, was also consigned to the revolt and joined it on November 21, 1917. The 10-Pounder Motor Section Royal Field Artillery (RFA) and its six trucks worked alongside the HACB for the rest of the campaign. At least one Wolseley truck and six to eight Ford Model T "box" cars made up the rest of the band. The artillery section was commanded by RFA Lieutenants Samuel H. Brodie and George C. Pascoe.<sup>14</sup> Both units were under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Pierce C. Joyce, who was in overall charge of the British Military Mission to the Hejaz. A small aviation section that provided reconnaissance and air support completed the mix of units.

Desert motor sports were about to begin in the Hejaz.

<sup>12</sup> The HACB was manned by three officers, 23 Motor Machine-gun Corps (MMGC) and 25 RASC drivers of "other ranks," i.e. enlisted men - not officers. The 10-Pdr Motor Section consisted of two officers with 30 RFA and 12 RASC drivers of other ranks.

<sup>13</sup> S.C. Rolls says that in addition to Blue Mist, Blast, and Bloodhound, there was another tender called "Grey Knight." This may have been LC 0808 after it was de-armoured. S. C. Rolls, *Steel Chariots in the Desert*, (Driffield, East Yorkshire: Leonaur, 2005), 144. Rolls' book was originally published by Jonatan Cape in 1937. See also footnote #15.

<sup>14</sup> G.E. Badcock, LTC, *A History of the Transportation Services of the Egyptian Expeditionary Force, 1916-1917-1918*, (London: Hugh Rees Ltd., 1925), 296.





### Chasing Blue Mist

How do we know Blue Mist was an earlier car? S.C. Rolls described Blue Mist as “an older one than the others, which were of the latest ‘Alpine’ type.”<sup>15</sup> He said she had a weak back axle, which would also indicate the earlier model. And he stated that Blue Mist was used as a “spare” tender, an important detail that we’ll come back to later.

Over the years, noted Rolls-Royce historian Tom Clarke and Pierce Reid used the sparse photographic evidence to ferret out technical clues. But first, we should say a few words about the Rolls-Royce chassis numbers. The company began to serialize its cars from late 1905 by the number of cylinders followed by the year; so, for example, one of the earliest 30 h.p. six-cylinder cars was numbered 60500, the next was 60501 etc. But, in 1906 the company forgot to change the year and soon had to use 607xx, skipped 608xx, and then moved to 609xx for cars during 1907-09. In 1909 it was decided to restart its numbering, beginning with chassis 1001, which lasted until 1913.

The Rolls-Royce Heritage Trust image of Blue Mist in Damascus shows a “dropped” front axle and a parallel bonnet - features limited to early-series cars. Cars after the 1100 series had straight axles. A second IWM photo is a long distance shot of the car taken at the Wadi Itm well above Aqaba.<sup>16</sup> It shows Blue Mist’s short body and reveals the car has an early axle (pre-1700 series) and 3/4 elliptic spring mounts (60588 to 2099 series). It also shows Blue Mist’s gas tank is under the front seat, not in the rear as on later vehicles. Another detail shows the car doesn’t have steering column cross-tube bracing. That means it was an early, pre-1100-series closed car before it was stripped of its body after impressed into His Majesty’s Service.

One other esoteric bit of information is that the “quadrant” or “spider plate” on the steering wheel is open - not solid, which

makes the car post 60589 and pre-1400 series. This places it in the 60920 and 1015 chassis number range. Tom’s research narrowed the possibilities to around 18 cars. He (along with Ray Millington) posited that Blue Mist could be either chassis 60985 or 1001. Several years ago, Tom noted:

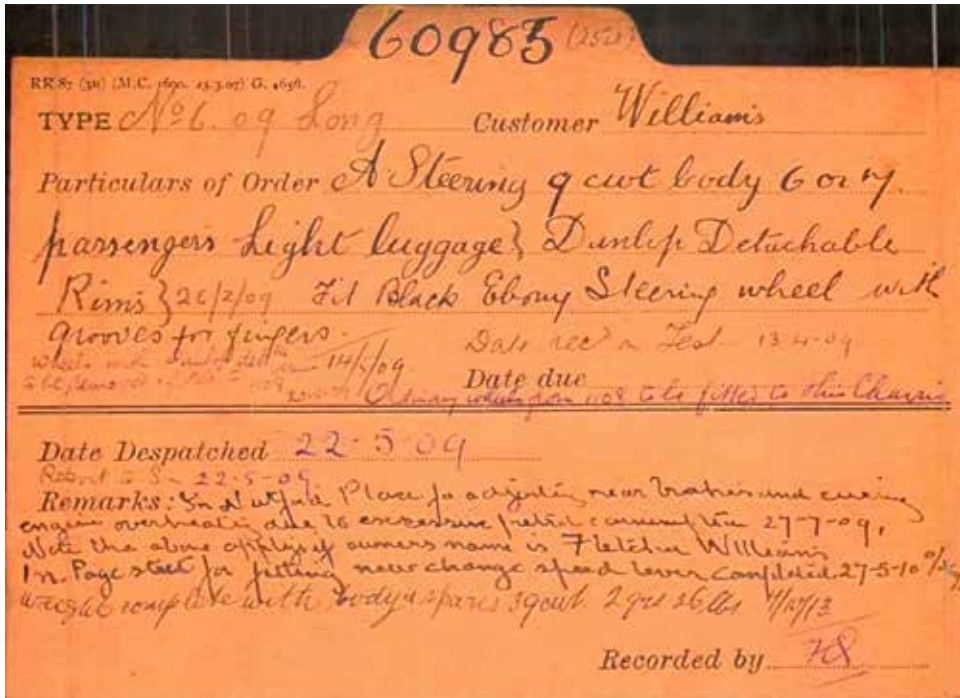
“The first one fits the Arab scene. According to Rolls-Royce records, 60985 was originally a Maythorn limousine, owned by the Earl of Clonmell immediately prior to being used by the military throughout the Great War, and then intriguingly noted in Egypt in 1920. The second, 1001, has other claims to the title. This is because one source said Blue Mist was the “first in a new series.” 1001 could be interpreted as 1st in 1000 series.”

But the sales records of Rolls-Royce for the 609xx series of cars were not readily available. And there was no record of the name “Blue Mist” in Rolls-Royce records.<sup>17</sup> At the time, our search had run into a seemingly insurmountable obstacle.

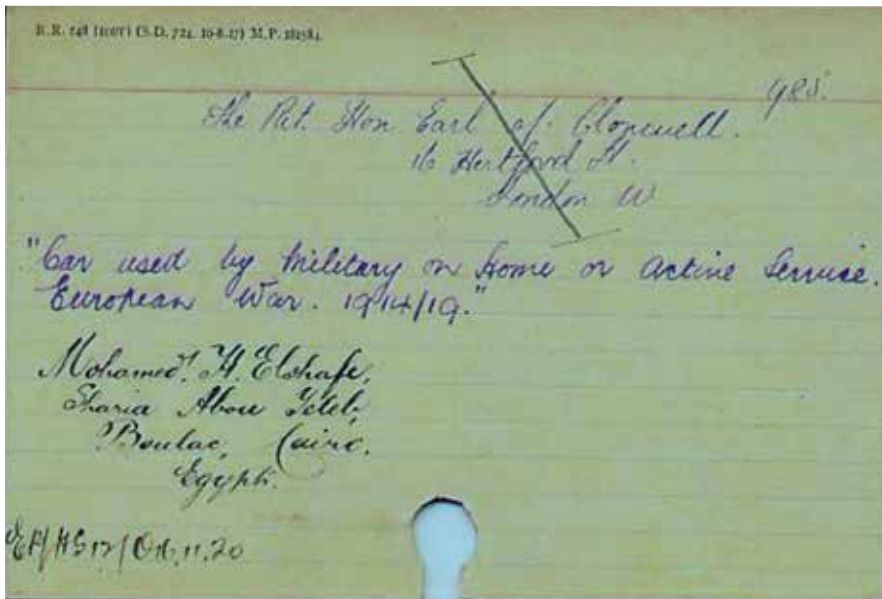
<sup>15</sup> S. C. Rolls, 227.

<sup>16</sup> IWM photograph Q 59573

<sup>17</sup> Names such as “Silver Ghost” and “The Wicked Wraith” were used on cars commissioned by the company itself and recorded in their files. A customer who commissioned their car from the beginning could choose their own name - not all of these were recorded by Rolls-Royce. “Blue Mist” may have been named by her first owner. “Blast” and “Bloodhound” were named either by the Duke of Westminster or the Royal Navy Armoured Car Division.



Rolls-Royce Order & Construction Card for 60985.



Rolls-Royce Company History Card showing "Wartime Service" of 60985

Courtesy of the RREC

**Blue Mist in Action**

Beyond the photograph in Damascus, there is little specific information describing Blue Mist by name in the revolt or her association with Lawrence. In order to document her involvement in the campaign, several primary sources were used.

multimedia-show called "With Allenby in Palestine and Lawrence in Arabia."<sup>18</sup> In his book, Thomas makes the expansive claim that Blue Mist was Lawrence's favorite.<sup>19</sup> S.C. Rolls, who often drove Lawrence, seems to refute that claim. Turning to the official War Diaries of the HACB, we

From Rolls-Royce we know the specifications of the pre-1914 cars. Blue Mist's engine was smaller at 7036cc and she had a three-speed transmission, limiting its torque and top speed compared to the Alpine Eagles. Essentially, Blue Mist was the runt of the litter.

The earliest date mentioned of Blue Mist's activities is in S.C. Rolls biographical memoir, *Steel Chariots in the Desert*, when he places her in early September 1918 before the raid on Dera'a. Rolls (no relation to C.S. Rolls, a founder of the company) was a driver of tender LC 341, known as "Blast." In his vignette, Rolls described how Blue Mist's driver tried to set himself on fire while fueling the car at night by the light of a candle. Luckily, the driver and car survived more or less unscathed.

Lawrence mentions Blue Mist in his *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*. The date is about September 13, 1918 and he describes how the car is used to catch up with the Arab Army south of Amman, in present day Jordan. Lawrence then described arriving south of Damascus in the car, the day before the city falls on October 1, 1918. He had been driven from Dera'a, some 120 kilometers to the south, in one day on roads more suited to ox carts than motorcars. The next day, he is in Damascus and has his picture taken with McKechnie.

In his book, *With Lawrence in Arabia*, Lowell Thomas doesn't mention Blue Mist until Lawrence arrives in Damascus. Thomas was only with Lawrence for two days in the desert. He wasn't in a position to confirm much about the car or the Arab Revolt because of the short time he was actually in the region before returning home to peddle his

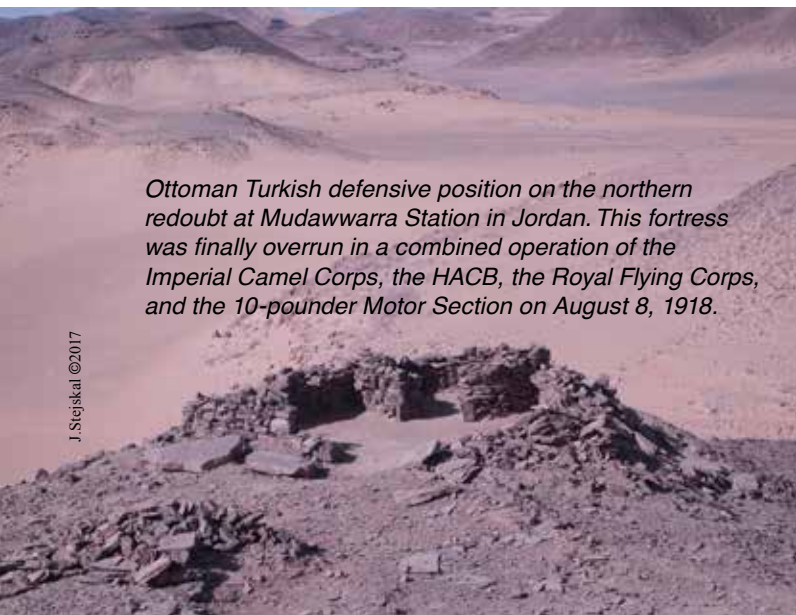
18 R. Pierce Reid, "For I can Raise no Money by Vile Means": T.E. Lawrence and his Relationship with Money, Debt and the Historical Record," (Oxford: The Journal of the T.E. Lawrence Society, Vol XXIV, No. 2) 51; Quoting a letter from T.E. Lawrence to Col. Ralph Isham, 10 August 1927, T.E. Lawrence Papers, MSS. Eng. d. 3335, Bodleian Library, Oxford, UK.

19 Much of Thomas's writings concerning the technical aspects of Lawrence and the Revolt should be taken with a large grain of salt.



find the cars are described only as a “tender” and sporadically with their military registrations. Eliminating the armoured cars, the Wolseley, the Fords, and the Talbots, we are left with four tenders numbered: LC 341, LC 1105, LC 1928, and LC 1298.<sup>20</sup>

LC 1298 is mentioned only once in the diaries and is probably a transposition error of the number 1928.<sup>21</sup> Photographs of LC 341 and LC 1105 exist and they are clearly later models, which leaves LC 1928 as our Blue Mist candidate. While the diaries are inconsistent at providing the LC numbers for each movement, where they are used it is clear that LC 341 and 1105 are used for heavy lift, i.e. the carrying of ammunition and explosives forward to the railway for demolition operations.



*Ottoman Turkish defensive position on the northern redoubt at Mudawwarra Station in Jordan. This fortress was finally overrun in a combined operation of the Imperial Camel Corps, the HACB, the Royal Flying Corps, and the 10-pounder Motor Section on August 8, 1918.*

J. Stejskal ©2017

LC 1928 generally is noted as a courier or liaison vehicle, delivering important messages or the senior staff quickly to their destinations. It does get involved in one operation with Lawrence accompanying an armoured car into the line for some railway destruction. The final bit of information that confirmed LC 1928 is Blue Mist is an entry dated June 9, 1918, which states it “was broken down due to rear wheel collapsing.”<sup>22</sup> This was

a common occurrence with the Talbots whose wooden wheels were prone to failure in the extreme heat and dryness of the desert. Blue Mist was the only Rolls-Royce in the HACB with wooden artillery wheels. Its wooden wheels would be replaced with wire-spoked wheels shortly thereafter.

In *Seven Pillars*, Lawrence wrote that he “made Blue Mist mine” just before the final push on Damascus.<sup>23</sup> The war diaries discuss how, in late September, Colonel Pierce C. Joyce was conducting operations near Amman designed to push the enemy into the arms of Allenby’s main thrust and permit the Arab Army to reach Damascus. The three armoured cars and the heavy tenders LC 341, 1105, and now 0808 were fully engaged. But the lighter Blue Mist was available and Lawrence needed her. Driven by Corporal McKechnie, he and Major Stirling made the run into the city of Damascus to ensure it was the Arabs who got full credit for its capture from the Ottoman-Turks and not the Allies.<sup>24</sup> Arriving the same day and around the same time as the first Commonwealth unit to enter the city, the Australian Light Horse cavalry, Lawrence did just that.<sup>25</sup>

Much like Lawrence was the man of the hour, so too was Blue Mist the car of the moment. Like the average sportsman who made the winning point in an otherwise lost game, Blue Mist, the lightest Rolls-Royce of the Battery, was there when that iconic photograph was taken. It has become part of the iconography that is Lawrence of Arabia. On 4 October 1918, Lawrence left Damascus in the tender LC 1105 and would never return.<sup>26</sup> There are no further entries in the War Diary for LC 1928.

### The Final Search

Knowing the military registration number of Blue Mist was helpful to track its activities with Lawrence but told us nothing of her origins. To definitively determine her provenance, the team went back to the books. Neither Lawrence nor Rolls mentioned Blue Mist’s origin or owner, but Walter F. Stirling left a clue.

In his memoir, Stirling says Blue Mist was the “first of a new series” and was “given as a wedding present to [Hugh] Lloyd-Thomas, who was the First Secretary [at the British High Commission] in Cairo. It had then been commandeered by Army.”<sup>27</sup>

As previously noted, Tom Clarke went through the Rolls-Royce records on multiple occasions but could not find a car that had been purchased by either Lloyd-Thomas family or the family of his bride, Guendaline Ada “Aileen” Bellew. So who

<sup>20</sup> Armoured car LC 0808 appears in later diary entries as a tender. She was “down armoured” in Aqaba between 18 and 26 Aug 1918. WD Vol 1, No 5, Pg 4. [Pdf 66/87]

<sup>21</sup> LC 1298 [sic] is mentioned in HACB War Diary (WD), Vol 1, No 3, Page 2 [Pdf 28/87]

<sup>22</sup> HACB WD, Reconnaissance 3, Page 8 [Pdf 46/87]

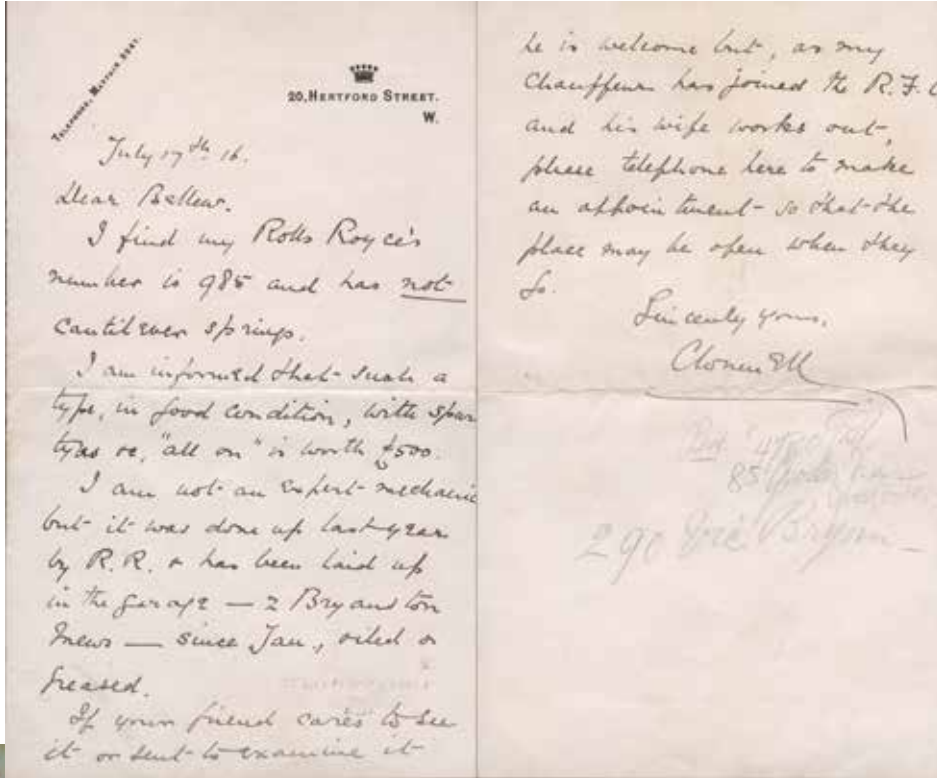
<sup>23</sup> Lawrence, SPOW, 785.

<sup>24</sup> Matthew Hughes, “Australians and the fall of Damascus, 1 October 1918,” *Journal of the Australian War Memorial*, No.26, April 1995. The British were keen to establish the Hashemites in a strong position in central Syria to destabilize French claims to this area enshrined in the 1916 Sykes-Picot agreement. Thus, the Australians were first into Damascus, but Faisal’s Army got the credit.

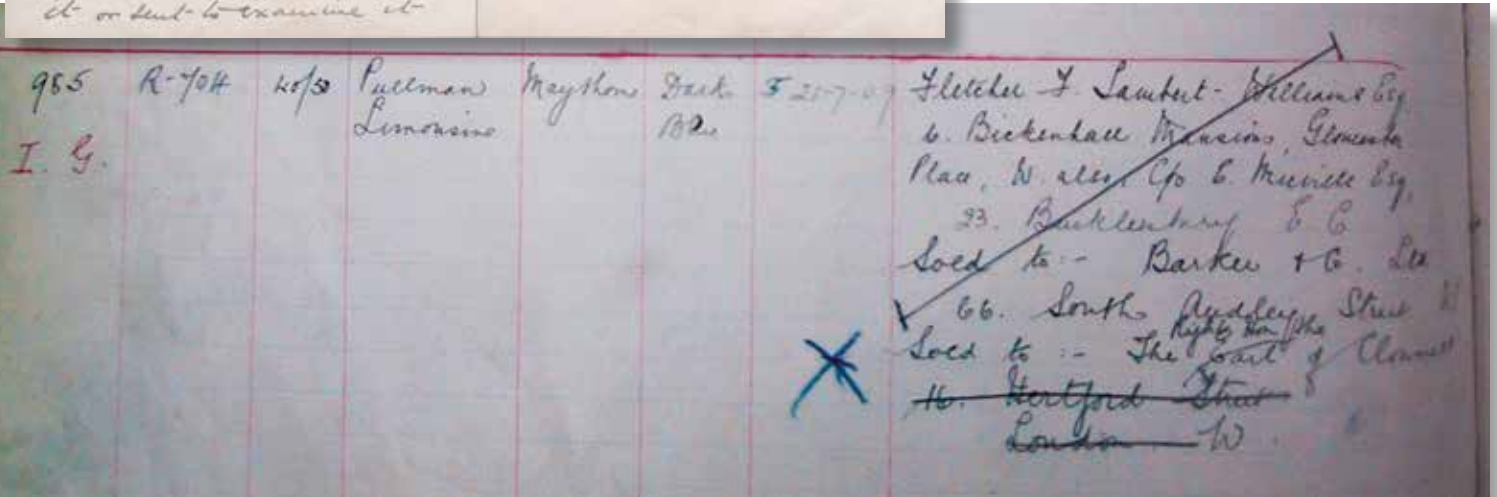
<sup>25</sup> The day was October 1, 1918. The 10th ALH Regiment entered northern Damascus at 6 am (0600). Lawrence entered the town around the same time from the south. For political expediency, Faisal and his Northern Army were accorded the honor of being the city’s “liberators.”

<sup>26</sup> HACB War Diary, Vol 1, No 8, Pg 5. [Pdf 82/87] - Jeremy Wilson’s biography of TEL (page 568) states Lawrence left Damascus in Blue Mist. The War Diary corrects this mistake.

<sup>27</sup> W.F. Stirling, *Safety Last*, (London: Hollis and Carter, 1954), 92



Clonmell describing the car and its chassis number in a letter to Bellew.



(Below) Rolls-Royce Company Guarantee Ledger from 1909. Entry shows 60985's sale to first owner, Mr. Fletcher F. Lambert-Williams who was lost in the Titanic sinking.

would have purchased a car and given it to Lloyd-Thomas, if he did not buy it himself?

The only way to find out was to contact the family and hope the memory of the car had not been extinguished in the intervening years. Philip Walker made the final breakthrough using the same techniques he had used to great success in finding relatives of the comrades who served with Lawrence for his book.<sup>28</sup> We asked for his help. After some weeks of searching and following the fine threads of the Lloyd-Thomas family genealogy, Philip was able to contact a grandson, who lives in South Africa. He did not have any information on Blue Mist, but put Philip in touch with his sister in England. She in turn contacted her cousin, a granddaughter of Hugh and Aileen Lloyd Thomas. This cousin was crucial, because she knew that

one of her half-brothers, who lived in California, had some information about Blue Mist. More than that, the California-based grandson had carried out detailed research. He sent Philip a paper on his work, scans of original documentation, and a photograph of the surviving remains of Blue Mist that were in his possession.

**A door at the end of the long hall had opened.**

According to Richard Weston-Smith, grandson of Aileen and Hugh Lloyd-Thomas, Blue Mist was his grandmother Aileen's car. She purchased it from the Right Honorable the Earl of Clonmell for £400 in September 1916, shortly before she married Hugh on October 19, 1916. The letter of sale from Clonmell to "Miss Bellew" lists the car's chassis number as 985 and, being built in 1909, the complete number is 60985.

<sup>28</sup> Philip Walker, *Behind the Lawrence Legend: the Forgotten Few Who Shaped the Arab Revolt*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, February 2018.



From Rolls-Royce files, we learned that Blue Mist had already had an “interesting” life. It was a Maythorn Pullman limousine built for Fletcher F. Lambert-Williams. Tragically, the first owner (Lambert-Williams) died in the Titanic disaster. The car was subsequently acquired by Lord Clonmell.

After Aileen Lloyd-Thomas bought the car, it was shipped to Cairo where her husband was First Secretary at the British High Commission. Despite the war, the expatriate-community still reveled in Cairo’s nightlife. Aileen enjoyed a social life and was out on the town one evening in late 1917. Vanessa De Lisle, Aileen’s daughter, said her mother told a story of a man in flowing robes who swept into the nightclub they were visiting and asked the gathered crowd, “Whose Rolls-Royce is this outside?”

Aileen answered, “It’s mine.”

The man introduced himself as Lawrence and announced, “I need to commandeer your car!”

And with that, he drove away. Several weeks later, the High Commission received a package addressed to Lloyd-Thomas containing parts from the car. We shall return to the package later, but... Blue Mist was off to war.

early September of 1919 and that it was sold to an Egyptian businessman in Cairo that same year. The car is believed to have been reunited with its original Maythorn body, but beyond that, no reliable record exists. It may have been scrapped or it could be parked in a garage in Cairo.

That said, what proof is there that Lawrence actually took Aileen’s car and that it was the Blue Mist?” The answer was in the package sent back to Lloyd-Thomas, which is still in the family’s possession. It contained an original solid silver and blue cloisonné enamel plate that states the car’s name simply and boldly: **BLUE MIST**

Seeing that plate, we knew the identity of Blue Mist was a mystery no longer. She was Rolls-Royce 60985.

The family initially knew little of Blue Mist’s adventures. Aileen Lloyd-Thomas knew only that it served with Lawrence. Then her grandson, Richard Weston-Smith, realized its connection to Lawrence and Damascus as he read *Seven Pillars*. He set about documenting the family’s history with Blue Mist, but never publicized their story of Aileen’s encounter with Lawrence nor the car’s identity.

In many ways, the evidence lay before us all the time. It took



*Blue Mist’s original name plate - 1909 40/50 chassis 60985.*

Where did Blue Mist go?

It is worth noting that some sources provided information on Blue Mist (and Lawrence) that were not only wrong, but led researchers in the wrong direction. For example, Lloyd-Thomas wrote that Blue Mist was refurbished and given to General Allenby as his staff car. But photos show Allenby had a different, later model Rolls-Royce. Additionally, an article in an otherwise reliable trade journal stated that that “Lawrence’s “Blue Mist” was handed over to the RAF in 1922, with 100,000 miles recorded in its logbook.”<sup>29</sup>

#### **Those sources were wrong.**

The Lloyd-Thomases heard nothing of the car until the end of the Great War. Two years would go by before their car reappeared in Cairo. In 1919, the family found Blue Mist abandoned by the side of the road, partially hidden and covered by a small sand dune on the city’s outskirts. After digging the car out, a new battery was connected and it started on the first try.

Hugh and Aileen Lloyd-Thomas were posted to Rome in 1919. They contemplated shipping the car to Italy, but decided to sell it instead. Papers in the family’s possession from the Cairo Motor Company indicates the car was for sale in

research, perseverance and a bit of luck to put it all together, but we now know the full story of Blue Mist.

The search for her “bodily” remains, however, continues.

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*The author and other researchers would like to thank Richard Weston-Smith and his family for their assistance with Blue Mist’s history.*

Pierce Reid recently wrote “*For I can Raise no Money by Vile Means: T.E.Lawrence and his Relationship with Money, Debt and the Historical Record,*” The Journal of the T.E. Lawrence Society, Vol XXIV, No. 2.

Philip Walker’s new book is: *Behind the Lawrence Legend: The Forgotten Few Who Shaped the Arab Revolt*, Oxford University Press, UK: February 2018, ISBN 9780198802273, £25; USA: February 2018, same ISBN.

James Stejskal’s third book, *Masters of Mayhem: Lawrence of Arabia and the British Military Mission to the Hejaz – the Seeds of British Special Operations*, will be published by Casemate Publishers in 2018.

<sup>29</sup> “The 40/50 Goes to War”, *Rolls-Royce Motors Dealer Journal*, Summer 1976 No. 3; reprinted in *The Flying Lady*, May/June 2005, pg. 7732 - 7734.