

Historians Discover the Identity of Lawrence of Arabia's Rolls-Royce

100 Years After the Capture of Aqaba, one of the Mysteries of The Great Arab Revolt is Solved

Alexandria, Virginia ([PRWEB](#)) July 05, 2017 -- A joint U.S./UK team of historians has uncovered the identity of Lawrence of Arabia's Rolls-Royce – the car in which Lawrence was photographed entering Damascus 100 years ago at the culmination of the Arab Revolt. The iconic photograph of Lawrence, taken in Marjeh Square in Damascus, Syria, shows two weathered British officers and a worse-for-wear Rolls-Royce. For decades, the identity of that vehicle has been a mystery to historians, Lawrence scholars and car enthusiasts. Using archival research, newly-uncovered photographs and technical analysis, the team has identified the Rolls-Royce as chassis number 60985, built in 1909 at Manchester, U.K.

In identifying the car, nicknamed “Blue Mist” the team not only confirmed the identity through a paper trail including diplomatic archives, war diaries, factory build records, family letters and other documents, they tracked down the descendants of the owner of the car when requisitioned by Lawrence in Cairo. The discovery has also unearthed official documents and parts of the car unequivocally proving its identity. Though the vehicle itself has not yet been discovered, it is estimated that, if found, “Blue Mist” would be one of the most valuable cars in the world.

“T.E. Lawrence remains one of the iconic figures of modern history,” said Alan Payne, editor of the peer-reviewed Journal of the T.E. Lawrence Society. “He was one of the most-recognized figures of World War 1 and an innovator whose tactics and philosophies are still core to modern warfare. But because of his enigmatic personality and his self-imposed exile from society at the end of the war, there are many mysteries surrounding his life and wartime service. So any new revelations tend to generate tremendous interest, not only among historians, but in a public fascinated by Lawrence. The excitement over this discovery almost exactly 100 years after Lawrence's capture of Aqaba – a feat showcased in the famous movie – is proof that even a century later, Lawrence continues to fascinate.”

“One of the enduring quotes from T.E. Lawrence was ‘a Rolls in the desert is above Rubies,’ noted James Stejskal, team member and lead author of the paper on the discovery. “Lawrence recognized that due to their reliability, speed and versatility his Rolls-Royce cars were a game-changer in the desert war. This helped him pioneer what we today call special forces and special operations. The famous photograph of Lawrence entering Damascus not only signaled the Arab victory in the region, but captured the truly pivotal moment in history that signaled the new role for the Middle East in the 20th and 21st centuries.”

Lawrence, along with the commander of the Arab Northern Army, Prince Faisal, deployed small mobile bands of warriors to defeat the Ottoman Turk and German forces in an area that, today, represents parts of Jordan, Saudi Arabia and Syria. Known as the Great Arab Revolt, this campaign is regarded by many historians as critical in the shaping of the modern Middle East.

ABOUT THE CAR

Rolls-Royce number 60985 was a 40/50 Horsepower chassis originally fitted with a limousine body built by Maythorn of Biggleswade, U.K. The chassis was built at the original Rolls-Royce plant on Cooke Street in Manchester, U.K. The car was an early-pattern Silver Ghost, equipped with transverse rear springs, a dropped (curved) front axle, a light rear-axle, and an under-seat fuel tank. It was named, possibly by Claude Johnson of Rolls-Royce, “Blue Mist,” making it one of just a handful of cars which were given colorful names, largely for

publicity purposes. Other ‘named cars’ included Dragonfly, The Silver Dawn, The White Knave and the iconic Silver Ghost – a name later applied to all 40/50 chassis. Though a number of named cars are known, researchers are still adding to the list.

The car was delivered on May 22, 1909 to Fletcher F. Lambert-Williams who would perish tragically aboard the Titanic. Rupert Charles Scott, the 7th Earl of Clonmell then acquired the car. It was sold in 1916 to Miss Aileen Bellew prior to her marriage to Hugh Lloyd-Thomas, a rising star in the British diplomatic corps. The couple took the car with them when Lloyd-Thomas was posted to the British High Commission in Cairo during the First World War.

Richard Weston-Smith, who lives in Santa Barbara California, is the grandson of Aileen and Hugh Lloyd-Thomas and he retains family records of the car. His documentation of his family’s history was a tremendous help to the research team.

According to Weston-Smith, “Diplomatic life in Cairo was very social and as diplomats, my grandparents were very much in the center of the circle. They were out on the town one evening in July 1917 when, according to family history, a man in flowing robes swept into the club they were visiting and asked the gathered crowd ‘whose Rolls-Royce is this outside?’ My grandmother Aileen indicated that it belonged to her, and the man introduced himself as Col. T.E. Lawrence and then announced that he was commandeering the car ‘in the name of his Majesty’s armed forces.’ And with that, he drove away. Granny never saw the car again, but several weeks later, a package addressed to my grandfather arrived at the Embassy, containing several pieces of the car, including the enameled plate bearing the name ‘Blue Mist.’ I have always thought that was very considerate of Lawrence!”

Though parts of the car, most notably the silver and enamel nameplate with “Blue Mist” on it, remain, the whereabouts of the car itself are unknown. It was last known in Cairo after WW1 where it was likely re-united with its original body. It was recorded as sold to an Egyptian businessman. If discovered today, given its Lawrence provenance and its iconic status, experts believe that it would be one of the world’s most valuable cars, certainly worth tens of millions of dollars. A replica tender is currently being constructed on a 1919 Rolls-Royce 40/50 Alpine Eagle chassis and it is hoped to be ready for display in 2018.

ABOUT THE TEAM

The team that uncovered the identity of the Blue Mist assembled in summer of 2017 at a meeting of the Rolls-Royce Owners Club in Asheville North Carolina. Their discussions led to a realization that each held clues as to the identity of Lawrence’s Rolls-Royce, but none were sufficient, alone, to identify the vehicle. The effort involved research in the Rolls-Royce factory records at The Hunt House, U.K.; diplomatic archives; the records of the Imperial War Museum; and several family collections and war diaries. Photo analysis, including detailed study of previously unknown pictures, provided significant technical clues. And primary source information, including a memoir of Lawrence’s driver Samuel Rolls, provided additional information. The breakthrough came when the car was identified as having been purchased under the maiden name of Miss Aileen Bellew. This led the team to family members in South Africa and California whose records and archives were able to finally tie the story together.

James Stejskal, principle author of an upcoming article on the discovery, spent 23 years with the United States Army Special Forces and subsequently served for 13 years as a senior operations officer (case officer) with the Central Intelligence Agency. His 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. Philip Walker is a noted Lawrence expert who traced Richard Weston-Smith through the same research techniques he used in tracking down the descendants of men involved in the Arab Revolt and who are the subject of his new book: *Behind the Lawrence Legend: the Forgotten Few Who Shaped the Arab Revolt*. Walker's book is scheduled for publication by Oxford University Press in February 2018. Tom Clarke is a Rolls-Royce historian who has published numerous books and articles on the marque. He developed an interest in "Blue Mist" while assisting in the publication of the iconic two-volume set "The Edwardian Rolls-Royce" by John Fasal and Bryan Goodman. R. Pierce Reid is a retired marketing executive, psychological warfare expert and former police officer who now runs a vintage Rolls-Royce restoration shop. His recent Norwich University master's thesis, *For I can Raise no Money by Vile Means: T.E. Lawrence and his Relationship with Money, Debt and the Historical Record*, was published in *The Journal of the T.E. Lawrence Society*, Vol. XXIV, No. 2.