AD-A170 709 GENERAL HAIG'S DENTAL SURGEON FROM PARIS : SIR AUGUSTE CHARLES VALADIER A PIONEER IN MAXILLO-FACIAL SURGERY (U) ARMY WAR COLL CARLISLE BARRACKS PA W P CRUSE 1/1

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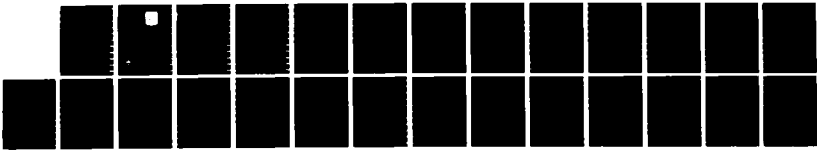

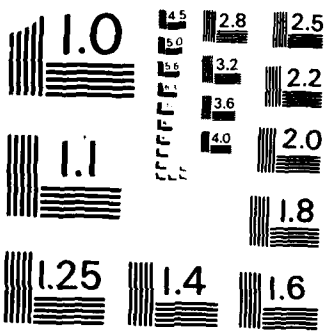

STUDY PROJECT

GENERAL HAIG'S "DENTAL SURGEON FROM PARIS": SIR AUGUSTE CHARLES VALADIER, A PIONEER IN MAXILLO-FACIAL SURGERY

BY

COLONEL WILLIAM P. CRUSE

7 APRIL 1986

US ARMY WAR COLLEGE, CARLISLE BARRACKS, PA 17013

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SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF THIS PAGE (When Data Entered)

ADA170789

REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE

READ INSTRUCTIONS BEFORE COMPLETING FORM

1. REPORT NUMBER	2. GOVT ACCESSION NO. / 3. RECIPIENT'S CATALOG NUMBER
4. TITLE (and Subtitle): General Haig's "Dental Surgeon from Paris": Sir Auguste Charles Valadier, A Pioneer in Maxillo-Facial Surgery	5. TYPE OF REPORT & PERIOD COVERED: STUDENT PAPER 6. PERFORMING ORG. REPORT NUMBER
7. AUTHOR(s): COL William P. Cruse	8. CONTRACT OR GRANT NUMBER(s)
9. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME AND ADDRESS: U.S. Army War College, Carlisle Barracks, PA 17013-5050	10. PROGRAM ELEMENT, PROJECT, TASK AREA & WORK UNIT NUMBERS
11. CONTROLLING OFFICE NAME AND ADDRESS: SAME	12. REPORT DATE: 7 April 1986 13. NUMBER OF PAGES: 22
14. MONITORING AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS (if different from Controlling Office)	15. SECURITY CLASS. (of this report): UNCLASSIFIED 15a. DECLASSIFICATION/DOWNGRADING SCHEDULE

16. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of this Report)

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT A: Approved for public release; distribution is unlimited.

17. DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT (of the abstract entered in Block 20, if different from Report)

18. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES

19. KEY WORDS (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

20. ABSTRACT (Continue on reverse side if necessary and identify by block number)

This research paper is an historical update on Sir August Charles Valadier a French-American dentist credited with developing new techniques and equipment for treating maxillo-facial trauma during the Great war of 1914-1918. The paper explains how Valadier, a citizen of the United States, became the first dentist to serve with the British Expeditionary Force in the opening weeks of World War I. It further postulates that Valadier may very well have been the mysterious "dental surgeon from Paris" whose timely treatment of a high-

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4,000 words/one photo
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A Historical Update

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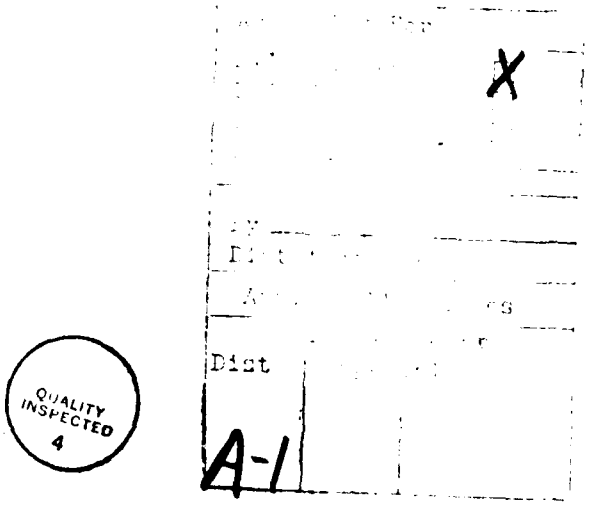

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7 April 1986

USAWC Military Studies Program Paper

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A Historical Update

by

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7 April 1986

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am especially indebted to Doctors Jacques R. Foure and Are C. Edwards who each interviewed Robert Vielleville in Paris and provided me with invaluable transcriptions and notes of their interviews. And I must thank Robert Vielleville for supplying so many colorful, first-hand accounts of my subject.

I would also like to express my gratitude to Mrs. May Mills of Huntsville, Alabama, and Professor Jim Hanlon of Shippensburg University in Pennsylvania for their thoughtful comments, corrections, and constructive criticism.

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: William P. Cruse, COL, DC

TITLE: General Haig's "Dental Surgeon From Paris": Sir Auguste Charles Valadier, A Pioneer in Maxillo-Facial Surgery

FORMAT: Individual Study Project

DATE: 7 April 1986 PAGES: 18 CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

This research paper is an historical update on Sir Auguste Charles Valadier, a French-American dentist credited with developing new techniques and equipment for treating maxillo-facial trauma during the Great War of 1914-1918. The paper explains how Valadier, a citizen of the United States, became the first dentist to serve with the British Expeditionary Force in the opening weeks of World War I. It further postulates that Valadier may very well have been the mysterious "dental surgeon from Paris" whose timely treatment of a high-ranking British officer eventually led to the decision to incorporate dental officers into the military force structure of Great Britain. Valadier's activities and accomplishments before, during, and after the war are detailed for dental and military historians.

Introduction--My First Encounter With Valadier

In October 1914 during the Battle of Aisne, Sir Douglas Haig, Commanding General of the First Army of the British Expeditionary Force in France, was suffering from a severe toothache. When his aides requested that a staff dentist be summoned to treat Haig's problem, they were embarrassed to discover that no staff dentists were available. Unfortunately, not a single dentist was attached to the Expeditionary Force of some 90,000 troops.[1] Thus the War Office hurriedly dispatched a handful of dentists from Britain to attend to the officers and men fighting on the Western Front. But by the time any of them arrived in early November, one Charles Valadier had already been commissioned as a 'Local Lieutenant' and attached to the Royal Army Medical Corps (RAMC) at Boulogne. Thus Valadier, who was an American citizen at that time, became the first dentist to serve officially with the British forces in World War I.[2,3] In all likelihood, his first official task was to relieve General Haig's toothache, even though no official records indisputably support this conjecture.

Yet beyond all conjecture, Charles Valadier emerges as a colorful and important figure in military medical history. He served the British forces and their allies well during the Great War. He is credited with "establishing the first Plastic and Jaw Unit, which so facilitated the later progress of plastic surgery." One of his colleagues recalls him as "smooth and genial," a "great fat man with sandy hair and a florid face" who used his "remarkable linguistic talents" to persuade superior officers to provide modern dental surgical facilities for wounded soldiers.[4]

As a United States Army Exchange Officer attending a course in orthodontics at the Royal Medical College (under the auspices of the Royal

Army Dental Corps) in the spring of 1981, I first learned of Valadier and began my research on his fascinating career. With the support and assistance of another avid dental historian, Major General Esmond Bowen, Director of the Army Dental Service (United Kingdom), I gained access to Valadier's official personnel file. With this evidence and the fruits of further research, I have learned a great deal about this pioneer of dental surgery.

As my research proceeded, my interest was whetted by many questions. For instance, why did Valadier elect to volunteer his services to the British forces rather than to those of France, the country where he was born and where he was practicing at the outbreak of hostilities? What role did he play in the development of new oral surgical techniques for treating the many horrendous maxillo-facial injuries caused by the revolutionary and devastating methods of World War I warfare? How did Valadier become one of only two dental surgeons to be knighted by the King of England for services rendered to the war effort? Although I have not been able to answer all these questions fully, my research has provided enough answers to warrant a chronicle of what I have uncovered and to review previously published information.

Early Life and Education (1873-1901

Auguste Charles Valadier, born in Paris on 26 November 1873, was the child of Charles Jean-Baptiste Valadier and Marie Antoinette Valadier.[2] He spent his infancy in Paris with his parents until the age of three when he emigrated to the United States with his father. Little is known of

Charles' early life in America, but he did gain United States citizenship when his father became a naturalized citizen about 1880.[3]

Although there are yet some unanswered questions regarding Valadier's education and training in the United States, we know most of the highlights of his career in our country. He attended the College of Physicians and Surgeons at Columbia University and claimed to have taken a medical degree there in 1895. Afterwards, he earned a dental degree from the Philadelphia Dental College (now the School of Dentistry at Temple University) in 1901.[3] He then passed the written and practical examinations administered in Philadelphia on 18-21 June 1901. At that time, his residence was 1524 Chestnut Street in Philadelphia. Valadier was issued licence number 955 on 6 July of that year.[5] However, nothing indicates that he practiced dentistry or medicine in Pennsylvania.

Practice in New York (1901-1910)

At this point, Valadier's career is somewhat difficult to follow. He later claimed (on an application to serve with the British Army) that he earned a qualification at New York Medical University in 1903.[3] However, a search of the alumni catalogs and announcements of the institution, including listings of special and graduate students, has failed to document this claim. A possible explanation could be that Valadier studied with a particular physician at the school without taking any formal courses.[6] Even if that is the case, he probably did not earn another qualification, for he already had medical and dental degrees. He did, however, move to New York, where he passed the state dental board examination on 2 May 1902 in

New York City.[7] Ivy attributed Valadier's reported address at that time, 42 East Main Street in Rochester, to be that of his father. Likewise, Ivy has speculated that Valadier may have conducted an "advertising" dental practice in New York City, thereby debarring himself from membership in the dental societies.[8]

Valadier certainly did practice dentistry in New York. He resided at 297 West Central Park and had an office at 39 West 36th Street. His office hours were certainly a bit strange by present-day standards, for he only listed "12 o'clock until 1:30 PM." And, at the same time, he noted the hours for residence as "until 10:30" (AM) and from "6-7" (PM). Exactly what type of dental practice he conducted during these odd hours is unknown. He was, however, a member of the New York County Medical Society, New York Pathological Society, and the Physician's Mutual Aid Association.[9,10] The obvious lack of membership in any dental organization can again be attributed to his "advertising" practice.

While Valadier was busy building his New York practice, an ambitious young French dentist named Robert Vielleville finished his formal training in Paris and was advised by a colleague to gain additional experience in the United States. By coincidence, he met friends of Valadier aboard a ship sailing for America about 1909. Upon arriving in New York, a dinner meeting was arranged for the two French dentists. Vielleville was able to produce some work--an upper first premolar on which he had made an MOD (Mesial-Occlusal-Distal) gold foil filling--which so impressed Valadier that he immediately invited Robert into his practice as an assistant.[11] They practiced together, the young preceptor under Valadier's cover, until 1910. Later, Vielleville returned the favor in Paris by covering for Charles while he earned his French qualification.[3]

Pre-War Parisian Practice (1910-1914)

Valadier returned to France in 1910 upon learning of the death of a brother who had been practicing medicine in Paris. Valadier's widowed mother, Marie Antoinette, also wanted Charles to return to Paris and be near her. She enticed him back by renting a sumptuous fifth-floor apartment for him at the fashionable 22 Place Vendome. One might wonder how the wife of a pharmacist could afford this style of living for her family. Reputedly, the widow Valadier, still a very handsome woman, was the mistress of Gordon Bennett, the wealthy American publisher and sportsman.[11,12] This would not be the last time that Marie Antoinette's wealth would provide the fiscal springboard for Charles' professional pursuits.

Since he was not qualified to practice in the country of his birth, he studied at the Ecole Odonto-Technique de Paris from November 1910 to June 1911. Although this six-month course must have served as the basis for certification, he was not awarded credentials to practice on his own account until July 1912. At that time, the Faculty of Medicine at Paris University granted him a license for the independent practice of dentistry.[2]

During this period, Valadier also established a professional relationship with Doctor H. Spencer Brown at the Pasteur Institute. Brown and Valadier collaborated in experimenting with the use of autogenous sensitized streptococcus vaccines for the treatment of periodontal disease. Valadier mentions Brown in a paper he published in 1918.[13] When Valadier applied for a commission in the British Army, he used Brown as a character reference, which indicates they enjoyed a trusting personal and professional relationship.[3]

In July 1913, Valadier married Alice Wright, a granddaughter of the former United States Minister to Brazil, Robert Clinton Wright. Robert Vielleville attended the wedding at the Madeleine Church in Paris and related an anecdote which reveals a bit more about the mysterious Charles Valadier. During the ceremony, a church verger discreetly whispered something to the officiating priest. Robert noted that the ceremony slowed perceptibly from that point on. When it was finally completed, Robert went into the vestry to congratulate the bride and groom. The mood of Charles did not fit the occasion, for he was absolutely livid! "The bastard!" exclaimed Valadier, "They made me pay 25,000 francs!" Robert explained that it seemed Charles had been married before and subsequently was divorced; therefore, he should not have been given a proper marriage in the church.[12]

After their marriage, the newlyweds chose to take a larger apartment at 47 Avenue Hoche. Vielleville was still practicing with Valadier, but he was beginning to feel crushed by Charles' overpowering personality. Consequently, he decided to strike off on his own. Meanwhile, Valadier's practice continued to thrive. Among his clientele were the King of Spain and Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church.[3]

Army Dental Surgeon (1914-1918)

When war broke out in August of 1914, Valadier was still practicing at Place Vendome. In fact, he was attending the annual meeting of the American Dental Society of Europe, held in Paris that year, when the German declaration of war on Russia caused France to mobilize her armies on 1 August.[14] Given his background and location, Valadier would seem an

obvious candidate for service with the French forces. Or if he was prevented from serving France, he might have become affiliated instead with the American Hospital in Neuilly, a suburb of Paris. In August 1914, a group of American residents in Paris led by the United States ambassador organized a military hospital and ambulance service in connection with the Neuilly facility.[15] Valadier would have seemingly been tailor-made to fit right into that organization, but there is no record of his being employed with the American Hospital before or during the war.

Valadier may not have chosen to serve with the French because they did not have an organized dental corps at the time and dental care for their soldiers was provided in a very haphazard manner. He thus may have felt stifled and encumbered to perform under those circumstances. Also, due to his age (40 years) and citizenship (United States), he was faced with the choice of voluntary enlistment as a private in the French army or service in the Foreign Legion.[12] Given those choices, it is no wonder that Valadier preferred to serve with the British. Even so, he volunteered without any assurances regarding the length or outcome of the war. His commitment to serve certainly indicates considerable courage and conviction.

A further revealing circumstance may be found in a letter from a solicitor to the War Office in London written on Valadier's behalf in 1915. It reports that Valadier was staying at Southminster, Essex, when the war broke out.[3] Since Britain declared war on Germany on 4 August and since Valadier's presence at the dental meeting in Paris from 30 July to 1 August is well documented, one might assume that he wished to relocate his wife in England. This would account for a hurried trip to Southminster in the turmoil of those uncertain times. Alice could very well have been pregnant, for a son was born during that time frame. Shortly afterwards, when

Valadier was attempting to gain British citizenship, he expressed a desire to permanently relocate his family in Southminster. This, however, did not come to pass, for with the exception of a brief three-month stay in London, supposedly to satisfy residency requirements, Valadier never took up permanent residence in England.[2]

Upon returning to Paris, Valadier volunteered his services to the British Red Cross Society and, after acceptance, was dispatched in September to Abbeville, about 100 miles north of Paris. From there, he travelled another 50 miles until he found the British setting up a field headquarters around the channel port at Boulogne. Valadier was attached to the RAMC there and assigned to Number 13 General Hospital, which had just arrived from England on 16 October 1914.[3,16]

It is important to consider that the British Expeditionary Force had hurriedly deployed to France and the Low Countries without attaching even a single dentist to provide for 90,000 troops. Although the services of civilian dentists had been contracted during the latter stages of the Boer War, the British Army would not have a separate commissioned dental corps until 1921.[1] So Valadier stepped into a vacuum on October 29 when he was accepted for duty with the British forces in France. You can imagine how he impressed the British recruiting officers as he arrived at their headquarters in a chauffer-driven Rolls Royce. He was given the rank of "Local Lieutenant" and attached to the RAMC at Boulogne.[3]

During that same month, records indicate that Sir Douglas Haig, commanding the First Army about 70 miles northeast of Paris, was suffering from a severe toothache during the Battle of Aisne.[1] When it was discovered that a dental surgeon from Paris had to be summoned to provide a remedy for Haig's suffering, British authorities hurriedly requested that a

dozen dentists be dispatched from England to serve the War Office of France. But by the time they arrived in early November, Valadier had already been attached with the RAMC, thereby establishing himself as the first dentist to officially serve with the British forces.[2,3]

One cannot positively conclude that the "dental surgeon from Paris" who treated General Haig was, in fact, Valadier. But the claim seems most plausible for several reasons. For if Valadier left Paris for Abbeville in September as reported, he would have been at or near the British General Headquarters during the Battle of Aisne.[3] This combination of proximity and necessity may have been enough to afford him the distinction of treating the British First Army commander. When these circumstances are coupled with the facts that Haig later recommended Valadier for a decoration in 1916*, helped him obtain a temporary and honorary commission in the RAMC, and personally petitioned on his behalf after the war, we have a strong case for identifying Valadier as the "dental surgeon from Paris." Valadier was subsequently awarded the Companion of the Order of Saint Michael and Saint George on 26 June 1916.

Although Valadier could be accused of earning his awards by providing gratuitous service to the general staff, that was not the case. He earned his awards by providing a unique service to the severely wounded soldiers. Valadier's patronizing care of the British general officers provided the means to accomplish that goal. He convinced the British authorities of the

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*"I cannot speak too highly of the excellent and most valuable surgical work on the jaw performed gratuitously by this gentleman for all ranks of the British Army. He has performed a large number of operations on the jaws that require a high degree of surgical skill, with the most excellent results, and which had not hitherto been attempted by the profession. I strongly recommend that he be given some tangible recognition of his valuable services." [Signed] D. Haig, General 30th April, 1916.[3]

of the need for a medical facility to treat face and jaw wounds. This was located at Wimereux and attached to the 83rd General Hospital as a separate 50-bed, 2-ward unit. Valadier was in charge and had numerous practitioners associated with him.[2] Among them was Harold Gillies, who later established himself as one of the finest plastic surgeons of his time. His description of Valadier, published in 1957, reveals a remarkable picture:[4]

> In Boulogne there was a great fat man with sandy hair and a florid face, who had equipped his Rolls Royce with dental chair, drills, and the necessary heavy metals. The name of this man whose high riding boots carried a polish equal to the glitter of his spurs was Charles Valadier. He toured about until he had filled with gold all the remaining teeth in British GHQ [General Headquarters]. With the generals strapped in his chair, he convinced them of the need of a plastic and jaw unit.... The credit for establishing the first Plastic and Jaw Unit, which so facilitated the later progress of plastic surgery, must go to the remarkable linguistic talents of the smooth and genial Sir Charles Valadier.

Since Valadier was fluent in English, French, and German, we might wonder whether or not he was capable of being "smooth and genial" in all these languages. There can be no doubt of his persuasive use of English![3]

Although the polished riding boots and glittering spurs were a part of the uniform Charles was authorized to wear, he was, nevertheless, a bit of a dandy. This habit frequently irritated some of his professional colleagues, particularly the physicians and surgeons of the RAMC. But the riding tack might not have been completely for show because Valadier did profess an ability to ride when he applied for a commission with the RAMC.[3] Another dental surgeon, who served with Valadier early in the war, painted this colorful picture. "As an individual, Valadier struck me as a charming, jaunty cowboy; in fact, he showed me how to roll a cigarette with one hand, while holding the reins with the other hand."[2]

In addition to his Rolls Royce dental operatory, Valadier also provided the equipment and laboratory technicians for the hospital unit at Wimereux. Most of the funds must have come from earnings derived from his wealthy practice in Paris. Also, Valadier's widowed mother passed away in 1915, leaving him a considerable estate.[3]

In June and July of 1915, a large contingent of medical personnel from Harvard University and the University of Chicago arrived in France to staff the No. 22 and No. 23 General Hospitals, respectively. Even though it would be another two years before the United States would formally enter the war, many American medical personnel were allowed to provide their services to all belligerents under the auspices of the International Red Cross. In August, the Director General of Army Medical Services in France, Sir Arthur Slogett, requested permission from the War Office to grant these men temporary and honorary ranks in the RAMC commensurate with their professional standing. This would afford them certain privileges and recognition that the 'local' rank would not sustain. The request was later granted; subsequently Valadier was also awarded a temporary and honorary rank of major in the RAMC on 30 April 1916. In 1918 he was recommended for a promotion to lieutenant colonel, but this was never granted.[3]

Throughout the war, Valadier seemed to be at the vanguard in treatment of maxillo-facial injuries. An excellent description of his work can be found in reports he published in 1916 and 1917.[17,18] The reports contain case studies, before and after photographs of terribly disfiguring wounds, improvised equipment designed to aid his treatment methods, and both intra-oral and extra-oral appliances used in his treatment. By January 1917, Valadier and his staff had treated over 1,000 cases of jaw and facial injuries. Many of the patients arrived in a septic and fetid state two or

three days after being wounded. Yet in spite of the conditions, only 27 deaths were reported, and seven of those were deemed beyond saving upon arrival.

Valadier's method of providing frequent irrigation to the wound site was particularly innovative. He improvised a device which could be wheeled about on the ward, affectionately dubbed "the fire engine." It consisted of a large drum (fabricated from a gasoline can) of sterile water to which the necessary tubing, spigots, valves, and guages had been fitted. A bicycle pump was connected to the water source in order to provide sufficient pressure for irrigation.[18]

The surgical principles advocated by Valadier may have been controversial at the time, but some are considered very sound today. He constantly stressed the importance of salvaging all the teeth, even though they might be in the line of fracture. Valadier also advocated early primary closure of facial lacerations and serial orthodontic movement in cases involving severe fractures.

In 1918, Bainbridge described Valadier's treatment after visiting the Face and Jaw Unit in Wimereux. "He attributes part of his success to the fact that he at once puts in an apparatus for the jaws so that the parts will not contract badly....He uses only sterile water for dressings and mouth washes, irrigating every hour under hand pressure. His collections of wax models, pictures, and stereoscopic photographs in color is really remarkable." Valadier advised that as much bone as possible be saved. "Whenever any piece is attached at all, save it. I would rather chance its sloughing out than remove it. Early in the war I needlessly sacrificed bone, but do better now."[19] Without doubt, Valadier was a skilled, resourceful, and innovative oral surgeon. He was instrumental in both

advancing and documenting improvements in maxillo-facial surgery during World War I.

Knighthood and Dissolution (1918-1931)

A list of Valadier's awards and decorations include the companion of Saint Michael and Saint George (1916), Associate of Saint John of Jerusalem (1917), Chevalier of the Legion of Honor of France (1919), and, finally, Knight Commander of the Order of the British Empire (1919).[2,3] Since he was still an American citizen in 1919, Valadier was not eligible to receive the "accolades" or full use of the title ordinarily conferred by the K.B.E.. However, by 1920 he had become a naturalized British subject and was then authorized to use the title "Sir" as well as all the various distinctions of knighthood.[3]

The only other dentist to be knighted for service during World War I was Sir Frank Colyer, whose base of operations during the war was in England. Interestingly, Colyer and Valadier were bitter antagonists, as the methods of treatment advocated by each were sometimes diametrically opposed. Colyer eventually cared for many of the patients evacuated from Valadier's ward in Wimereux to the Croydon Jaw Hospital near London. He sometimes removed splints, extracted questionable teeth, and treated the inevitable sepsis which plagued all practitioners prior to the advent of penicillin. Valadier's methods, he claimed, were unsound.[2] But dental history has been far kinder to Valadier than was his professional rival.

Very little is known of Sir Auguste Charles' post-war activities. After being discharged, he returned to Paris and continued his extremely

successful dental practice. As he had learned to do during the war, he always maintained a stable of outstanding fellow workers.[11] This allowed Charles to pursue his interests in other areas. He became President of the American Dental Club of Paris and was affiliated with the American Hospital at Neuilly.[8]

However, Valadier began to gamble for high stakes and fell into difficult times late in his career. In the late 1920s he retired from active practice but continued to run up gambling debts, frequently at the casino in Le Touquet. After contracting a blood disease, possibly leukemia, he died penniless on 31 August 1931 at his villa in Le Touquet on the coast of Normandy.[2,8] His post-war difficulties and personal unrest surely and sadly place him among the Lost Generation, generally more celebrated among literati than the health professions.

The widowed Alice was now left to fend off Charles' numerous creditors. She soon found herself in difficult financial straits when French authorities attempted to requisition her home. Alice approached the British Embassy in Paris with a request to obtain a certificate validating her deceased husband's war service. She sought some recompense from the British for Valadier's gratuitous services. Eventually the Officers' Association dispensed two grants of twenty pounds each. But Lady Valadier's true savior was a former patient of her husband, an Indian maharajah, whose generous gift rescued her from a destitute state. She eventually returned to her native land in Brazil where she died sometime after 1947.[3,11,12]

Clinically speaking, we may gain little by studying such historical figures as Valadier. His methods of treatment and appliances have long since been replaced with newer and improved techniques. Even so, the

exploits of Auguste Charles Valadier remind us of the countless colorful characters who have made the fabric of our dental history so fascinating.

Epilogue

After carefully examining the life of Auguste Charles Valadier, I have noted some interesting comparisons in the development of commissioned dental corps among our World War I allies. On the one hand, we find that the first dentist to serve with the British forces in World War I was an American citizen. On the other hand, William Saunders, the man credited with being the first military officer to function as a dentist in the United States Army was born in England.[23] Both came to the United States--Valadier from Paris and Saunders from London--at an early age.

The United States Army Dental Corps had been formed in 1911, yet neither France nor Britain had a commissioned dental corps at the beginning of the 1914-18 war. Even the Dominions seemed to have been more advanced, since both Canada and New Zealand sent a handful of dentists along with their expeditionary forces in 1914. The absence of a French and British uniformed dental service is particularly incongruous when one recalls that the development of early American dentistry can be traced directly to France and England.

While I cannot offer an easy explanation for the absence of a dental corps in the French army, the case for the British seems quite obvious. By the law of the land, dentistry was considered to be a branch of medicine in Great Britain. The General Medical Council maintained the Dentists Register, supervised dental education, and took disciplinary action against

registered dentists. There was no separate commissioned dental corps for the same reason there was no separate General Dental Council: the medical profession ruled the roost and would not tolerate an autonomous branch within the health professions.[21] It is no wonder, then, that Valadier had some difficulties with the RAMC!

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