

A Falkland Islander DSO, by Keith Steward F.R.G.S.

Major George Archer Secombe Williams DSO, 2nd battalion South Staffordshire Regiment late Major 4th battalion; late Lieutenant South Nigeria Regiment, West African Frontier Force, late Lieutenant Royal Fusiliers was born in the Falkland Islands at Port Stanley on the 6th day of April 1874.

George Williams spent the best part of twenty years in uniform; five years nine months in West Africa, an undetermined period of time in East Africa and the years 1914 to 1919 or 1920 in France and Belgium. He was twice 'Mentioned in Dispatches' in West Africa during the years between 1900 and 1906, and three times during the First World War. He was awarded the DSO in the "London Gazette", on the 1st January 1919. He was undoubtedly resilient physically, hard working and competent yet he started and finished the First World War as a Major. The explanation is perhaps to be found in his First World War file¹, where he is shown as serving with the Regiment until the 1st August 1916. He is then appointed a Deputy Assistant Provost Marshal. It is likely that two years in the trenches at forty years of age was quite enough when he was probably still suffering from recurring bouts of malaria, the consequence of his years in West Africa. Major Williams is shown as being finally demobilised on the 1st April 1921.

Early Days 1874-1900

George Williams was the third child Charles Henry Williams, a solicitor From Cheltenham who had emigrated in about 1860 to the Falkland Islands to try sheep farming. Apparently the good citizens of Cheltenham were not sufficiently litigious to provide him with an adequate income¹ for his large family of at least seven children. Young George was educated in England, at the Lichfield prep school Baylis House. Later he entered Stonyhurst College in September 1885. Very little is known of his life between 1890 and 1900, except that he tried sheep farming in Tennessee USA and went to the gold fields of Western Australia.² In 1900, he obtained a 2nd Lieutenancy in the Royal Fusiliers. His appointment as Lieutenant 3rd battalion South Nigeria Regiment is dated 26 June 1901. The letter of appointment shows his address as Spratts Hayes, Exmouth Devon. He was advanced a month's pay prior to leaving and an outfit allowance of £30.

Aro 1901 1902

This was young Lieutenant Williams first campaign. It was by West African standards a major operation and was known as the Aro Field Force. The 1979

edition of Gordons 'British battles and medals', rather misleadingly states 'this bar was issued to fourteen British military Officers and 1830 native soldiers in addition to naval personnel. This is probably the figure given in the 'London Gazette of May 12th 1902 which refers to fourteen 'Special Service Officers. In fact, the figures were rather higher, particularly as far as the participation by British Officers is concerned. Magor³ has a figure of 1909 medals and clasps in his book; Christopher Hill in a transcription of the medal rolls that he produced in 1985 has a figure of 2130. This is confirmed in CO 520/14 f49, 'The Nominal Roll of Europeans with the Aro Field Force', it is summarised below:

<i>British Officers (Special Service or attached to the WAFF)</i>	83
<i>B,N,C,O's</i>	37
<i>South Nigerian Civil Service (including 14 Doctors &5 Nurses</i>	
<i>S.N. 'Jackdaw' and African crew members).</i>	94
<i>HMS 'Thrush'</i>	52
<i>Other Europeans</i>	3
<i>African Officers; Other ranks and a few Police)</i>	1861
<i>Total (ignoring a few returns to the Mint)</i>	2130

The Aro expedition was a major operation that had required many month's of planing .It was very much an example of ' Ideal Imperialism 'rather than a hasty response to a call for help from a group of besieged Europeans. The objectives were essentially:

- the abolition of the slave trade and the establishment of a market for labour.*
- the abolition of the fetish known as 'Long Juju'*
- the opening of the interior between the rivers Niger and Cross to trade.*

The expedition was under the command of Lieutenant Colonel Montanaro RA and was judged a success. A tribe of Aros who had massacred some 400 women and children were swiftly dealt with and some of the ringleaders hanged. The role played by Lieutenant Williams is not known, nor in which of the four columns he served. There were however several actions involving hard fighting and bayonet charges.

The casualties ⁴amounted to 13 Europeans wounded; some severely (Captain Sabine lost one eye); 27 other ranks killed;140 other ranks were wounded and there were 70 deaths from disease. The official 'Gazette' records that 83 Europeans were admitted to hospital mainly suffering from malaria; 746 was the relevant number for the African rank and file. The honours included one CMG, brevet major (local Lt Col) A .H. Festing D.S.O.; 11DSOs; 4Brevets to major;3 D.C.M.'s (for the British N.C.O.'s) and 3 W.A.F.F. D.C.M.'s, for the African soldiers.

Rather noticeably the commanding officer received nothing. The answer is to be found in a letter from the War Office to The Under Secretary of State at the Colonial Office. It says: "I am directed to acquaint you for the information of Mr Secretary Chamberlain that Major and Brevet Lieutenant Colonel Montanaro Royal Artillery,

has now agreed to separate from the lady known as Mrs Montanaro until the legality of the marriage can be proved. The Secretary of State for War, with the concurrence of the Commander in Chief no longer objects to that officer being employed.”⁵ The problem was that Lieutenant Colonel Montanaro had attended a reception where their Royal Highness’s, The Prince Princess of Wales were present with a lady posing as his wife .She was in fact still the wife of a certain Major Green of the 1st Lincolnshire Artillery Volunteers. Although Colonel Montanaro had divorced his previous wife, Major Green had neglected to do the same.Colonel had already been informed in June 1896,by the Commander in Chief, that if he again introduced the lady as his wife, he would be required to retire from the Army. He was given a further reprimand and had to wait until October 1904 for his CB. He had been mentioned in despatches eight times⁵.

South Nigeria 1902

This clasp was sanctioned by Army Order 49 of 1906 to all officers and men who took part in one or more of eight patrols. The patrol reports have not yet been found, so it is not known with which patrol Lieutenant Williams served. The medal rolls show that 559 medals and clasps were issued: 30 to British Officers; 9 to B.N.C.O.’s; 1 Doctor ; 11 Colonial Service Officers and 508 to the Native Officers ; N.C.O.’s and men of the South Nigeria Regiment.

South Nigeria 1902-3

This clasp to the Africa General Service Medal was authorised by Army Order No4 1905, and No49 for 1906, for ten small expeditions undertaken between July 7th 1902 June 1903.⁶ The number of troops involved on each occasion was small, varying from 100 to 400 combatants. According to Lesley Probyn CMG,the Acting High Commissioner for Southern Nigeria .The objective of the campaign was to stop inter tribal warfare. Most of the Europeans involved were likely to have been present at more than one engagement, although unfortunately the patrol reports do not seem to have survived. The Gazette does state that engagements and sniping took place on 201 days.

European participation in the campaign is shown in the following table:

<i>British officers</i>	<i>22</i>
<i>B.N.C.O.’s</i>	<i>11</i>
<i>Doctor’s</i>	<i>4</i>

<i>Other Civilians</i>	7
<i>Total</i>	44

In total the medal roll shows ⁷that there were 576 entitlements to this clasp, consequently some 532 must have been awarded to African Warrant Officers; N.C.O.'s and other ranks. Little additional information is to be gained from consulting the biographies of the period. Although several officers Trenchard⁸, Crozier⁹ And Douglas A.C. ¹⁰were serving in the vicinity, they unfortunately they did not participate in these particular expeditions.

The casualties are given in the "London Gazette", ¹¹as; Europeans slightly wounded 6; soldiers killed 13; soldiers wounded severely 26; slightly wounded 42. The Carriers had 7 killed, 2 severely wounded and 7slightly hurt. A number of British Officers were mentioned in the despatch along with one British N.C.O; Sergeant A. Anderson, Royal Lancaster Regiment and an African Warrant Officer, Sergeant Major Ojo Ibadan, South Nigeria Regiment.

South Nigeria 1903

This was for an expedition in September and early October 1903, again under the command of brevet Lt Colonel Montanaro. The objective was to capture Bibi-Cala a renegade who was known to be hiding on Wilberforce Island in the Nun River. The operation was deemed of sufficient importance and sensitivity for the Acting High Commissioner, Lesley Probyn CMG to accompany the force. Lieutenant Williams had been sent on ahead, some two months previously, to reconnoitre the area and provide intelligence for the operation.

Bibi-Cala had been causing trouble for a number of years; his offences included both murder and piracy. Several previous attempts at his apprehension had failed, with hindsight, it was thought through lack of detailed information and sufficient troops. One of these attempts had been a combined military and naval operation under Major Hodson of the Guides and Lieutenant D'Oyly RN of HMS Thrush. As usual the climate had made matters difficult and the delicate matter of not harming 'friendlies' had failed, because of the lack of accurate information.¹²

Wilberforce Island in 1903, was a mass of thick bush and swamp surrounded by a stretch of water some 150 yards wide. It was thought that Bibi-Cala had his

stronghold at Egbeddi, but the exact location of the defences was not known with certainty. The fact that neighbouring tribes actively supported the insurgent made matters even more difficult. Lieutenant Williams's report is dated the 24th July and mentions that the swamp water was already waist high in the bush and rising fast.

The attacking force under Colonel Montanaro, included Captain W.I.S Hosley as Staff Officer; Mr A.A. Whitehouse Political Officer; Dr E.J. Kelleher as Medical Officer and six British Officers including Lieutenant Williams; six BNCO,s; and eight Native Officers. A Naval party accompanied the expedition under Lieutenant Child R.N. comprising eight Royal Marine Officers and 85 crewmen for the S.W.'Valient;S.L.'Vixen;S.L.'Thistle; S.L.'Lily' and S.L.'Iris'.There were also three armoured and two steel canoes. At one point in the operation a whole section under Captain Hosely swam a distance of some 400 yards in full marching order and carrying 50 rounds of ammunition per man.

The expedition was a success': Bibi-Cala was captured, and an area of some 1200 square miles was brought under British rule. Lieutenant Williams was 'mentioned in dispatches'¹²

South Nigeria 1904

The fifth clasp to his Africa General Service Medal was for the Ibibio expedition (12th January to the 31st March 1904). Lieutenant Williams served under Captain H.C.Macdonald in No 1 Column, and was the only other commissioned officer. The other, a much larger column, was commanded by Colonel Montanaro and included twelve other officers and four B.N.C.O.'s. The patrol objective was to complete the submission and disarmament of the Erriam area that had been started by a previous patrol.

On March 7th, Captain Macdonald received a report that one of the soldiers, missing for a couple of days, had been killed. Lieutenant Williams, with eighty men was sent to find the perpetrators. The village was attacked and destroyed with 41 enemy casualties. Five days later on March 10th, Lieutenant Williams was again out on patrol;on this occasion the cooked and partially eaten body of the missing soldier (Private Ogunbiondo) was found. The village was destroyed after a fight. The South Nigeria Regiment suffered only one soldier killed and no wounded in return for 74 rebels killed. Lieutenant Williams is highly praised by the patrol commander, "He was the only officer I had with me and consequently a great deal of extra work fell to his share. This he always carried out in the most thorough and able way, never being satisfied till he had superintended the execution of any orders given. I consider it

would be impossible to find an officer in the Force more suitable for a Company Commander but of course his joining the service late handicap his chance.” ^{12a}

This is a reference to George William's age, now thirty years old and still a subaltern was due to his late appointment to the W.A.F.F. Captain Macdonalds recommendation was endorsed by Colonel Montanaro, and George Williams receives his second mention in despatches. Sergeant Major Olowi Giwa was also especially mentioned by the patrol leader for his great reliability when carrying out his orders.

A total of 910 medals and clasps were awarded for the various patrols covered by Army Order 1 of 1906: 30 British Officers; 12 to B.N.C.O.'s; 10 Colonial Service Administrators; 7 Doctors and 851 Native Officers, N.C.O's and privates. W.A.F.F. Distinguished Conduct Medals were awarded to Sergeant Ali Bakare and 2197 Private Ojo Otan.

West Africa 1906

Lieutenant George Williams sixth clasp on his Africa General Service Medal was for the expedition under Captain W.C.E. Rudkin R.F.A. against the Owa people. This was very much a punitive expedition in retaliation for the murder of Mr O.S. Crewe-Read the Assistant District Commissioner of the Asaba District. On the 8th June, while on patrol in the bush, Mr Crewe-Read's camp had been almost surrounded by hostile natives. The Police escort realising what was afoot, hurried the A.D.C. away from the camp. Crewe-Read however noticed that his pet dog was missing, hurried back to the campsite. He was almost immediately killed.

News of the murder reached the authorities on the morning of June 9th. The same afternoon, Captain Rudkin departed with three other officers and a doctor. Mr Chichester accompanied the patrol as Political Officer. One of the other officers, Lieutenant Walmsley-Dresser Royal Warwickshire Regiment was later dangerously wounded while leading a bayonet charge. Neither the "London Gazette" entry for 13th May 1907, nor the original report; tell us whether Lieutenant Williams was with the first patrol or one the other two, that reached Captain Rudkin on June 19th and July 2nd respectively.

The fighting continued until August 3rd, by which time all the native chiefs involved had either surrendered or had been captured. The "London Gazette", states that these operations were carried out in thick bush and during the rainy season. Captain Rudkin had under his command twelve Officers and 434 Rank and File. The casualties were 3 British Officers wounded; 12 other ranks' killed and a further 193

wounded.¹³ Captain Rudkin received the D.S.O. for this action and there were three W.A.F.F. Distinguished Conduct Medal's awarded for the period covered by this clasp: 2193 Company Sergeant Major Ali Jarfah; 144 Sergeant Awundu Barini Kanu; 1569 Corporal Fajenyo. Two British Officers also received a 'Mention in Despatches.' (Lieutenant H.C.Fox and Captain C.E.Heathcote.

Civil Administrator

On December 6th 1904, Lieutenant Williams applied for a transfer to the Civil Police. It is likely that this was for financial reasons as his salary had only increased to £325 a year plus £75 in allowances. He is very well reported on by his Commanding Officer, and indeed was shortly to be promoted to Captain. A letter written by Sir Walter Egerton, the Governor of Southern Nigeria, while on board his official ship, the "S.Y.Ivy" quotes Colonel Montanaro, "I most strongly recommend this officer, and I have the highest opinion of his ability energy and zeal and consider him well fitted for the post."¹⁴ There were no difficulties as far as the Colonial Office were concerned, it was not unusual for military officers of ability to perceive a quicker route to promotion and higher pay lay with the civil administration. Indeed, one of the Colonial Office officials cites the case of Captain Haslewood,¹⁵ who while serving with the 1st battalion the Gold Coast Regiment, transferred to a civilian administrative appointment.

George Williams then transfers to the 'Civil' as an Assistant District Commissioner, but does not remain for very long in Southern Nigeria. He resigns his appointment on 16th February 1906. On the 9th April the same year he is gazetted as a Captain in the 4th battalion the South Staffordshire Regiment. On the 25th of October the same year, he applies for Police Superintendent's position in British East Africa. It seems as though he wanted the step up in rank, without being tied to West Africa and the West African Frontier Force.

The 4th battalion South Staffordshire Regiment

Notwithstanding the climate, the conditions of West Africa were extremely arduous even to someone of Captain Williams's undoubtedly strong constitution. Six campaigns in less than six years, was an amazing achievement in the hot and extremely damp climate (90% humidity for most of the year). The Colonial Office, it should be appreciated, did not grant extensive periods of furlough out of generosity of spirit. In practice very few European Officers were able stand the climate for such a period; even fewer were awarded six campaign clasps for the African General Service Medal.¹⁶ The next reference to Captain Williams appears in the East African Protectorate correspondence,¹⁷ where he is seeking re appointment to the Civil Administration of Southern Nigeria.

A curious letter written by Captain Williams, East Africa Police is filed in PRO CO 533/40. It seems that while returning home on leave he was asked by the Colonial Office to observe a fellow passenger. The letter reads; " I first saw Mr Webster on 31st Jan 1907 on which day I travelled From Nairobi en route to Mombasa with him. He was then looking thin worried and very ill." The letter continues with details of them playing bridge together and trips ashore at Port Said, Genoa and Algiers. The letter concludes: "I necessarily saw a great deal of him...and never once during that period saw or heard anything which led me to think Mr Webster was not as sane as any man or woman on board the ship." Clearly the Colonial Office were using Captain Williams skills as a policeman to evaluate a suspected erroneous claim for pension on grounds poor mental health.

The trail of Captain Williams then fades until 1911 when he appears in the 4th battalion South Staffordshire Regimental Diary, as attending the annual camp at Shorncliffe. He is also selected to command the detachment from the Regiment for duty at the coronation of King George V on June 22-23rd. Indeed the Brigade Journal records that Field Marshal the Viscount Kitchener, expressed his approval at 'their steadiness on parade and the excellence of their behaviour'. Captain Williams received the Coronation Medal .The other recipients were the commanding officer: Lt Colonel E.A Bulwer; C.S.M. A.C. McDermott; No 7304 Private J. Langston (as the private soldier with the most service in the battalion); and the Quarter Master Lieutenant W. Brown.

The other important event in the life of Captain George Williams during 1911 is marriage to Miss Alice Lock, the daughter of Brigadier General F.A.E. Lock C.B. late Indian Army.¹⁸ Promotion to Major occurs on June 12th 1912. Major Williams is shown as attending the annual training camps in the summers of 1912,1913 and 1914. Each year, the battalion had some excellent officer group photographs taken

and the photograph for 1914 is reproduced on the next page. In the margin has been annotated, presumably some time during 1917, those officers who were subsequently killed in action and those accorded decorations.

The First World War 1914-19

Major Williams is shown in the battalion diary¹⁹ as joining the British Expeditionary Force in France on the 27th December 1915; he joined the 2nd battalion on January 10th 1916, as second in command. On the 14th, he is shown as conducting training exercises in preparation to going up the line. On June 17th, he takes 'A' and 'B' companies to Berguette le Quesnuy in Givenchy. On the 24, he assumed command of the battalion when Lieutenant Colonel Morgan D.S.O. went on a short home leave. Again on March 13th George Williams takes over command of the battalion while his commanding officer is away on an Artillery Course. On the 1st August, he is appointed Assistant Provost Marshall.²⁰ This is an appointment he continues to hold until demobilisation on the 1st April 1921.

Army Form B103 shows Major Williams as being 'Mentioned in Despatches', on December 11th 1917, which probably led to the award of the Distinguished Service Order on 1st January 1918. He was again mentioned in April the same year.

Epilogue

The final entry in WO 374/74810, is a letter written to Major Williams on 16th of May 1922, explaining that there is little chance of him obtaining employment as a Retired Officer Clerk in the War Office. The reason given for the refusal is that there is already a long list of applicants. The letter is addressed care of a Mrs Abraham of 11 Oak wood Court, Kensington London W14. Another entry in the file records that Major Williams died on the 19th February 1935 aged 60 years. On the 22nd a requiem mass was held at 'Our Lady of Victories', Kensington followed by burial at Kensal Green.²¹

¹Kit Layman & Jane Cameron, "The Falklands and the Dwarf", Picton Publishing (Cheltenham) 1995 p48.

²PRO CO 445/20 doc No 3118, 30th January 1905.

³"African General Service Medals", Naval & Military Press 1993 2nd edition p94; in fact the two sources are closer in the respective estimates because R.B. Magor does not include the medals awarded to personnel from HMS Thrush in his figure.

⁴Colonel A Haywood C.M.G., C.B.E., D.S.O., and Brigadier FAS Clarke D.S.O., Gale & Polden 1964 p65.

⁵PRO CO 520/16.

⁶R.B. Magor: op cit., pp 79-80.

⁷PRO WO 100/93.

⁸Andrew Boyle: "Trenchard", Collins 1962.

⁹Brig General F. P. Crozier, C.B., C.M.G., D.S.O., "Impressions & Recollections", T Werner Laurie 1930.

¹⁰ Archibald Campbell Douglas F.R.G.S.(Nemo) "Niger Memories" James Townsend & Sons 1930.

¹¹ The "London Gazette" 28th October 1904, p 6872, mentions twelve expeditions; perhaps two failed to qualify for the medal? Curiously the two expeditions described in detail are not among those mentioned by Hayward & Clarke op cit., pp68-9.

¹² PRO CO 520/20.

^{12a} PRO CO 520/24

¹³ "London Gazette" 13 May 1907.

¹⁴ PRO CO 445/20.

¹⁵ Captain Charles George Dearing Haselwood, 3rd East Kent Regiment, attached Gold Coast Constabulary 1896-8; 1st Gold Coast Regiment, W.A.F.F. 1898-1903.

¹⁶ Colonel D.Mathers D.S.O.,D.C.M., ;Captain A.Gibb D.S.O.,D.C.M., Major I.G. Hogg (8 clasps); Lt Colonel Sir Harry .Moorhouse Kt., C.M.G.,D.S.O.,R.A.

¹⁷ PRO CO 533/40, f371 Doc No 44353.

¹⁸ "The Stonyhurst Magazine" April 1935 (a publication for the 'old boys' of Stonyhurst School).

¹⁹ The Regimental War Diary, in the Staffordshire Regiment Museum, Litchfield.

²⁰ Ibid.,

²¹ "The Stonyhurst Magazine" April 1935.

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