Major Sir Auguste Charles Valadier (1873–1931)

and the

Oral Surgical Department
No 13 Stationary Hospital, BEF
Boulogne-sur-Mer and Wimereux
The ‘dental surgeon from Paris’ who provided the catalyst for the establishment of a dental service in the British Army was a Franco-American dentist by the name of Dr Auguste Charles Valadier, and much of what we know about him comes from four articles:

However, Valadier is referred to interchangeably in the literature as both Auguste and Charles, creating the impression they were one and the same.

Ordinarily this would not be a problem, but in his application to join the RAMC in 1914, Valadier describes himself as an oral surgeon and lists his qualifications as follows:

- College of Physicians and Surgeons, Columbia University, 1895
- Philadelphia Dental College, 1901
- New York Medical University, 1903
- Faculté de Médecine de Paris, 1912

However, in the absence of supporting documentary evidence, there have been questions about whether he had been a medical student at Columbia and completed medical training.
Charles Auguste Valadier at Columbia

• Reports in The New York Times reveal that a student by the name of Charles Auguste Valadier, had a very distinguished career at Columbia University.

• In the NY Times of 11 January 1891, under Columbia University, the honour men for 1889–90 included in the Sophomore Class, Charles A Valadier with honours in Greek, Latin, English Literature, Rhetorical Composition and German.

• On 9 June 1892 the NY Times reported that Charles A Valadier was a member of the 138th graduating class of Columbia University with a Bachelor of Arts. He achieved honours in Latin, Ethics, Botany, Experimental Psychology and History of Philosophy and received one of the 18 university fellowships awarded that year.

• He then spent three years studying medicine at the College of Physicians and Surgeons – the medical school of Columbia University.
Columbia University
in the City of New York

CATALOGUE OF
OFFICERS AND GRADUATES
OF
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY
FROM THE
FOUNDATION OF KING'S COLLEGE IN 1754

XVI EDITION

NEW YORK
PUBLISHED FOR THE UNIVERSITY
1916
Valadier passport applications

[Image of passport application form]

[Image of passport application form]
• It would seem that Charles Auguste MD was the elder brother of Auguste Charles Valadier, who was not medically qualified.
• Dr Auguste Charles Valadier. Graduation photograph, Philadelphia Dental College (DDS, 1901): second oldest dental school in the USA and since 1907 part of Temple University.
• In 1910 Auguste Valadier (McAuley refers to him as Charles) was persuaded by his widowed mother to return to France. Two years later when the Faculté de Médecine of the Université de Paris had granted him a Diplôme de Chirurgien Dentiste, Valadier established a fashionable practice at 47 Avenue Hoche in the 8th arrondissement of Paris.

(From Ivy (1971) Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery)
At the outbreak of war, Valadier approached the French authorities, but since they did not have a dental corps. He next offered his services to the BRCS without remuneration, subject to acceptance by the RAMC.

In October 1914, he was accepted for duty with the British Army by Sir Arthur Sloggett, Director-General of Medical Services in France, and assigned to No 13 General Hospital, BEF, Boulogne-sur-Mer, a base hospital with the temporary rank of Local Lieutenant.

Sir Arthur Sloggett DGMS France. Watercolour and charcoal by Francis Dodd RA, 10 March 1917. IWM ART 1825.
No 13 General Hospital BEF, had taken over the Municipal casino and was used largely as an evacuation hospital; in Nov 1917 it became American Base Hospital No 5 (Harvard) AEF under Harvey Cushing.

No 13 General also housed Sir Almroth Wright’s Research Laboratory, where Wright and RAMC Captains Alexander Fleming and Leonard Colebrook studied the bacteriology of septic wounds.
Tradition has it that requests to the War Office for dental officers date from October 1914, when General Sir Douglas Haig Commander of the BEF’s First Army Corps suffered severe toothache and there were no British dentists available to relieve the pain.

Valadier is almost certainly the ‘dental surgeon from Paris’ whose timely treatment of Sir Douglas led to the decision to incorporate dental officers into the army.
In January 1915 Gillies an ENT specialist was sent to France by the BRCS as a general surgeon.

By that time Valadier had convinced the British authorities of the need for special facilities to treat face and jaw injuries, described in the literature as a 50-bed unit attached to the 83rd (Dublin) General Hospital in Wimereux, a seaside town 3 miles north of Boulogne.

The only problem is that at the time No 83 General did not exist.
Valadier’s face and jaw unit was at 13 Stationary Hospital, located in a large shed for storing sugar on the Gare Maritime, Boulogne.

It had been commandeered by the RAMC in October 1914 and converted into a base hospital. It was an ideal site for transferring patients from ambulance trains to hospital ships bound for Dover and other English ports.
A ward at No 13 Stationary. Photograph kindly provided by Sheila Brownlee whose grandmother Ruby Cockburn (in the centre) worked as a British Red Cross nurse. To her right is a QAIMNS nurse.
No 13 Stationary, the ‘Sugar Store Hospital’ remained on the quay until September 1915, when the sheds were evacuated and it was reestablished as a hutted hospital on the road leading to Wimereux.

- IWM. Q 29159: 6 October 1916; Royal Engineers Collection.
The Major on the left — is almost certainly Auguste Charles Valadier.

IWM Q 29157: 6 October 1916; Royal Engineers Collection.
• Left. IWM Q 33463: Orderly dressing a jaw wound, special ward for jaw injuries. Miscellaneous Collection.
• Right. IWM Q 33474: Dental laboratory – plaster bench. Miscellaneous Collection.
• Operating theatre with Haab magnet for removing metallic particles from the eye.
• IWM Q 29158: 6 October 1916; Royal Engineers Collection.
This seems to have arisen from an arrangement made by Sir Alfred Keogh, DGAMS, with the Royal Colleges in Dublin led by Sir William Taylor, PRCSI, which had undertaken to supply medical men for a base hospital in France for periods of three months.
One gets the impression the name change had been a *quid pro quo* on Keogh’s part and distinctly unpopular with the existing staff. But that wasn’t the only problem.

Most MOs at Boulogne had been private practitioners and had given up their practices and joined the RAMC in 1914. Much resentment was created by the arrival of the Dubliners who had been able to carry on their practices for nearly 3 years.

Moreover, because of their lack of experience in the treatment of war wounds, they were then obliged to work as understudies of the existing staff.
• The change was nominal as the CO of No 13 remained in command ... and the ophthalmic and jaw surgery departments which had enhanced the reputation built up by No 13 as the Sugar Store Hospital, continued their work under their original officers.

• Chart recording injuries of Corporal Baxter, Australian Imperial Force admitted 15 August 1918.

• Courtesy of the Army Medical Services Museum, Keogh Barracks, Aldershot.
Initially, Valadier seems to have conducted all the surgical operations by himself, but it was decided he should be assisted by a trained surgeon and because of his expertise in ENT surgery, the surgeon assigned to the role was Captain Harold Gillies. How long Gillies remained with Valadier is not known, but the experience was the turning point in his career.

As Gillies was to acknowledge forty years later in *The Principles and Art of Plastic Surgery* (1957) ... “The credit for establishing the first British 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 (*sic*) Valadier.”
• Valadier published several papers during the war either as sole author, or with Captain H Lawson Whale who joined him in July 1916.

• When Lawson Whale was posted to Sidcup in 1918 he was replaced by Captain Frederick Cleminson, like Gillies and Lawson Whale, another Cambridge-educated ENT surgeon.

• The standard of treatment was clearly the equal of their German and Allied contemporaries, and further examples of the plastic surgery practiced in Valadier’s unit can be found in Lawson Whale’s book *Injuries to the Head and Neck* published in 1919.
• Distraction osteogenesis of the mandibular symphysis.
Reconstruction of the nose

Postscript

• Posterity has not been kind to Valadier, a man ahead of his time who made significant contributions to the advance of maxillofacial surgery that were conspicuously ignored by his colleagues.

• He was an outsider who appears to have been admired and disliked in equal measure – some of his contemporaries were clearly jealous of his flamboyant character, fluent French and German, chauffer-driven Rolls-Royce.

• Valadier also had friends in high places including General Sir Arthur Sloggett, DGMS France who appointed him to the RAMC, as well as Field-Marshall Sir John French, Commander-in-Chief of the British Army. He was also mentioned in dispatches three times and appointed CMG as early as June 1916, with strong personal support in a letter dated 30 April 1916 from General Sir Douglas Haig.
• Even Gillies in later years, although giving him full credit for establishing the first BEF maxillofacial unit, couldn’t resist making somewhat condescending comments about him – as Reginald Pound was to point out in *Gillies: Surgeon Extraordinary*, Gillies may have owed more to Valadier’s experience and skill than he was prepared to admit.

• To quote Fred Albee, the pioneering American orthopaedic surgeon ... “When the Almighty passed out jealousy, he gave most of it to the medical profession.”

• Interestingly, only two dental surgeons were knighted for their military service during the War – Frank Colyer and Valadier both in 1920 (in the case of Valadier, conferred in 1921 after obtaining British citizenship). Gillies had to wait until 1930 for his KBE.
• This 45/50 HP Silver Ghost was ordered by Hugh Montgomery in 1913: (Chassis no LW7027; Engine no 2643) total cost £1,016, and in October 1915 was sold in Paris via Barker & Co to Auguste Charles Valadier.
• In December 1916 the chassis was fitted with up-rated springs by Dutilloux & Ranlovich to cope with the weight of a dentist’s chair in the back!
• After the War the Silver Ghost was registered in the UK in 1921 as LW7027 by the third owner Mrs Helen Boye and painted blue/black. It was sold at Bonhams in July 2013 for £718,300 (NZ$ 1,426,254)