

## EMINSON, ROBERT ASTLEY FRANKLIN – Died 20<sup>th</sup> July 1916 aged 24

Second Lieutenant, 2nd Battalion, King's Royal Rifle Corps attached to 2nd Brigade Machine Gun Corps



Photograph courtesy of Dr Ian Eminson, nephew of the deceased.

Robert was born on 23<sup>rd</sup> August 1891, the fourth son of Thomas Benjamin Franklin and Clara (nee Burgess) Eminson of Gonerby House, Scotter. His father, known to his patients as Dr. Franklin or Dr. Tommy, was the son of Dr. Robert Eminson junior and the grandson of Dr. Robert Eminson senior. Three of his five sons were also to become doctors.

The five brothers were educated at Epsom College and from there Robert Eminson went to Cambridge to study Natural Science at Downing College.

In 1912 he was appointed as an assistant entomologist to the British South Africa Company and in January 1913 was sent to Northern Rhodesia to research the tsetse fly, the scourge of cattle and horses.

In January 1915 he returned home to volunteer for military service, and on 3<sup>rd</sup> June was gazetted to the King's Royal Rifle Corps as a Second Lieutenant, proceeding to the front in October.

By January 1916 he was, as he wrote home, "stuck into a brand new corps, the Royal Machine Gun Corp" an outfit which rapidly became known as the Suicide Club. Machine-gunners had a very short life on the front. His effectiveness was commended by Major-General Holland commanding the First Division. "I have read with great pleasure the report of your conduct on the night of 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> April in Loos Crassier in handling most effectively your machine gun when the Germans exploded a mine.

From his commendation until his death, Robert Eminson experienced six tours in the trenches; two with the added horror of gas attacks.

The following 3 excerpts are from the King's Royal Rifle Corps Chronicle:-

*'On 29<sup>th</sup> April at 4:00am the gas gongs and the bugle sounded GAS', and on 14<sup>th</sup> July 'During the afternoon, the Germans threw a particularly disgusting type of shell into Becourt Wood. The fumes of these shells made our men sick. We suffered 47 casualties, and 15... died from the effects of these fumes'*

Four days later the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion moved up west of Bazentin-le-Petit Wood into the second line trenches, with the Northamptonshires on their left. In the early hours of 20<sup>th</sup> July, *'At 2:30am, the Northants Regiment attacked the German trenches... It was a bombing attack and not successful owing to heavy machine-gun fire. 2nd Lieutenant Eminson was gallantly endeavouring to bring in a wounded sergeant when he was killed'*.

The wounded man was Sergeant Samuel Yerrell of the Northants. With both arms shattered by a bomb, he was helped back to the lines. Too exhausted to negotiate the barbed wire, he collapsed. *'Then a Second Lieutenant jumped out of our trench and went to help them... a German fired at them, the bullet passing through Sam's back and right through the officer's heart. The officer was killed instantly, and poor Sam died an hour later... The brave officer...was Lieutenant Eminson.'*

2nd Lieutenant Harry Holmes, a fellow machine gunner in the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, sent his account of the incident to Doctor Franklin Eminson in Scotter:-

*'There were a good many casualties and on the following morning your son observed a wounded man lying outside the trench, unable to get in by himself. He at once crawled out to him but found there would be some difficulty in getting him through the wire. It was after going out for the third time to reconnoitre a way in through the wire that the enemy machine gun caught him. The Battalion doctor went out to see if he could do anything, but your son was already dead. He has been recommended for the VC, both by the C.O. of this Company, and by the C.O. of the Battalion in question, but I am very much afraid that owing to the circumstances of the case, his very fine act will not meet with the recognition it deserved.'*

*(Lieut-Col Bircham, his C.O., was killed 3 days later.) I think however the best tribute which I can pay him, and his end, is to tell you what a corporal who witnessed the incident said to me "Well Sir" he said "No man could die better."*

Henry Tillett, his batman, felt the same way. On 24th July he wrote to Robert Eminson's mother:-

*'I was his servant and I cannot express in writing how very, very sorry I am and the rest of the men in losing such a good Officer... We will never forget the heroic way he gave his life to save another... and my comrades hope you will not take it to heart, but bear up in the knowledge that he was an Hero, a soldier and a man.'*

Robert Eminson is buried in Becourt Military Cemetery, Becordel-Becourt, Somme, France. PLOT – I. S. 16.

The inscription reads:-

*'The noble army of martyrs praise thee'*

He is commemorated on four war memorials - Scotter, Epsom College, Downing College and in Zambia (Northern Rhodesia) at the Victoria Falls. Two of the Eminson family gravestones also remember him. His Aunt's, Maria Jane Eminson, in Scotter churchyard records her three nephews who died in action during the Great War – Robert Eminson, Herbert Eminson and Herbert L. Eminson. That of his parents, in Scotter cemetery, carries this simple inscription:-

*'Robert Astley Franklin Eminson, 2nd. Lieutenant KRRC... killed in France trying to save a fellow soldier 2th July 1916. Greater love hath no man than this.'*

Robert Astley Franklin is one of the four grandsons of Dr. Robert Eminson junior who lost their lives in the Great War. His cousins, Richard Percival (Percy) & Herbert Franklin, are also remembered on the north face of the Memorial. Details of the other cousin, Herbert Luther, are shown in the section 'Others associated with the parish during the Great War.'



Photograph by kind permission of Len.

Source: [www.findagrave.com/memorial/56453385/robert-astley\\_franklin-eminson](http://www.findagrave.com/memorial/56453385/robert-astley_franklin-eminson)

There is another photograph of 2<sup>nd</sup> Lt R.A.F. Eminson on the Find a Grave website link, as well as a closer view of the headstone.