

Lieutenant Robert Ainslie Hamilton



Birth and Family

Robert Ainslie Hamilton was born on August 13th 1894 in Liverpool, the son of Dr. Robert Jessop Hamilton FRCSE, an ophthalmic surgeon, and Lylia Sophia Ainslie who died in 1907 when he was only 12. He had two elder sisters, Lylie Ethel Hamilton who was to marry Robert Martin, a Captain in the Royal Field Artillery in 1916, and Kathleen Hamilton who was to become a Missionary. His grandfather was Robert Hamilton of Magherabuoy, Portrush who married Jane MacMillan who was brought up at Glencrosh in the 1840s and 1850s, the daughter of Robert MacMillan and Mary Goldie.

School

Robert Ainslie Hamilton entered School House at Oundle in January 1909, was there during the census of 1911 aged 16, and left in July 1912.



Oundle School

World War One

In World War One, he became a Second Lieutenant on the 26th July 1915 in the Army Service Corps.

By 1918 he was a Lieutenant and was attached to the 5th Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry. From 1915 to the beginning of 1918 the battalion was part of the 148th Brigade, 49th (West Riding) Division which was involved in the defence against the first phosgene attack (19 December 1915), the Battle of the Somme in 1916, and the Battle of Poelcapelle during the Third Battles of Ypres in 1917.

On 2 February 1918 the battalion was transferred to 187th Brigade in the 62nd (2nd West Riding) Division, which was involved in The Battle of Bapaume (25 March) and The First Battle of Arras 1918 (28 March) which were the First Battles of the Somme 1918 in the German 'Spring Offensive'. Below is the Battalion War Diary for that period:

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.			Army Form C. 2118.
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information
ARRAS.	23 rd		Battn moved by forced march to BUCQUOY to take part and operate to hold up GERMAN advance.
BUCQUOY- PUSIEUX	24 th		Look up position in BUCQUOY- PUSIEUX line awaiting GERMAN advance.
	27 th		GERMAN attack drives in right flank of 62nd DIVISION near ROSSIGNOL WOOD. B and C coys move into Brigades reserve on right flank and counter with tanks driving the enemy back to ROSSIGNOL WOOD. A + D coys move to right flank in readiness for counter attack on night on the 28 th inst.
	28 th		Counter attack commenced at 5.30 a.m. in ROSSIGNOL WOOD. A B C coys push well forward and regain objectives (being on original front line).
ROSSIGNOL WOOD.			D coy held in reserve. Later on A B C coys are cut off by enemy and are missing. The Commanding Officer (Lieut Colonel O. WATSON, D.S.O.) killed during this counter attack. Major T. Shearman assumed command.
	29 th		Battn H.Q. personnel move up to and occupy trench, S.W. of ROSSIGNOL WOOD on defensive flank.
	30 th		Remnants of D coy join Battn H.Q.
	31 st		
1377 Wk. Worgs/1773 30/000 1/15 D. D. & L. A.D.S.S./Forms/C. 2118.			

WAR DIARY or INTELLIGENCE SUMMARY.			Army Form C. 2118.
Place	Date	Hour	Summary of Events and Information
			<p>to England for Commission.</p> <p>No 242496 Sgt Elliott, T.</p> <p>No 242664 Sgt Macdon E.</p> <p>No 242013 Sgt Harris G.</p>
TOTAL CASUALTIES			
Killed	Officers	Wounded	Missing
4	2	10	28
			OTHER RANKS
			Killed
			Wounded
			Missing
			70
			268
<p>J. Shearman Commanding 5th Bn. 10th Yorkshire Light Infantry.</p>			
1377 Wk. Worgs/1773 30/000 1/15 D. D. & L. A.D.S.S./Forms/C. 2118.			

Unit War Diary of 5th Battn Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry (KOYLI):

Arras 23rd MAR 1918 - The Battn moved to ARRAS. Billeted in the Communal College.

24th Mar 1918 - Battn moved into a position of readiness prior to German attack in front of ARRAS.

ARRAS 25th Mar 1918 - Battn moved by forced march to BUCQUOY to take part and operate to hold up GERMAN advance.

BUCQUOY- 26th Mar 1918 - Took up position in BUCQUOY-PUISIEUX line awaiting German advance.

PUISIEUX - 27th Mar 1918 - German attack driven in right flank of 62nd Division near ROSSIGNOL WOOD.

B and C companies move into Brigade reserve on right flank and counter with tanks driving the enemy back to ROSSIGNOL WOOD. A & D Companies move to right flank in readiness for counter attack on the 28th.

ROSSIGNOL WOOD 28th Mar 1918 - Counter attack launched at 5.30am in ROSSIGNOL WOOD. A, B & C coys push well forward and regain objectives (being our original front line).

D Coy held in reserve. Later A, B & C coys are cut off by enemy and are missing. The Commanding Officer (Lieut Colonel O. C. Watson D.S.O.) killed during this counter attack. Major T. Shearman assumed command.

29,30,31 Mar 1918 - Battn HQ personnel move up to and occupy trench, S.W. of ROSSIGNOL WOOD on defensive flank.

Remnants of D coy join Battn HQ.

Total Casualties:

Officers:

Killed - 4

Wounded - 2

Missing - 10

Other Ranks

Killed - 28

Wounded - 80

Missing - 268

Lieut Colonel O. C. Watson was to receive a posthumous Victoria Cross.

Robert Ainslie Hamilton was one of the other officers also killed in action.

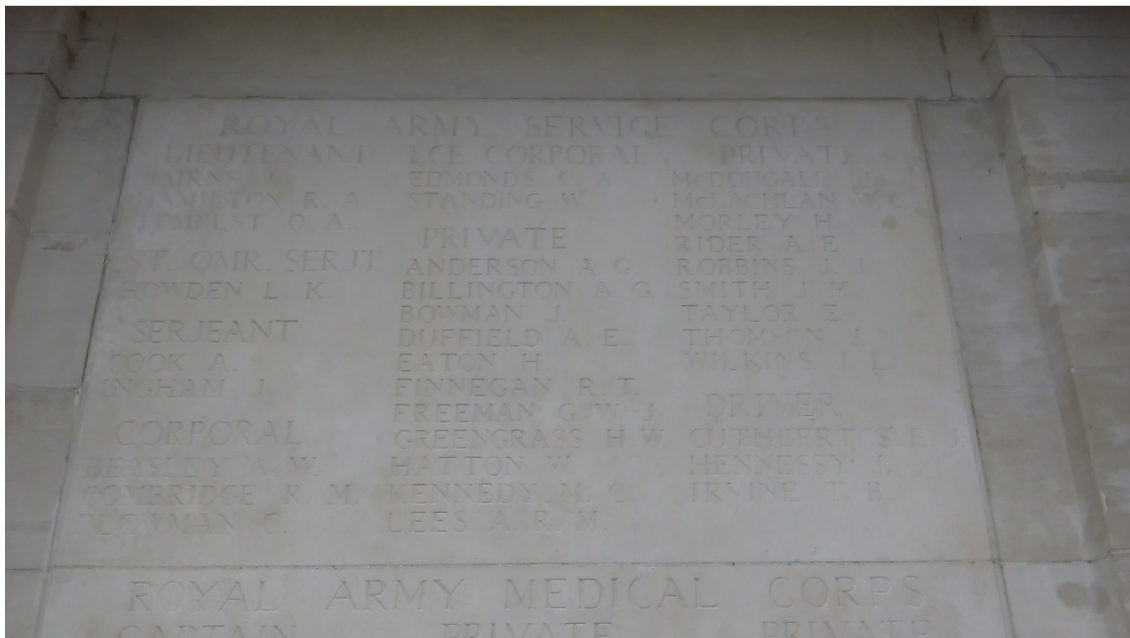
His Commanding Officer wrote: "He was killed on the night of March 27, 1918. The enemy had filtered through in a weak part of our line, and your son took a platoon out to bomb them back. In this he was successful, but was killed by an enemy machine gun... He was always cheerful and set a fine example to all ranks."

He is commemorated on the Pozieres Memorial (Panel 95) in the Somme, France along with over 14,000 other casualties who have no known grave.

Probate:

HAMILTON Robert Ainslie of 52 Rodney street, Liverpool; lieutenant A.S.C. died 28 March 1918 in France. Administration London 12 March to Caroline Emily Hamilton, spinster, and William Langstaff Ainslie solicitor.

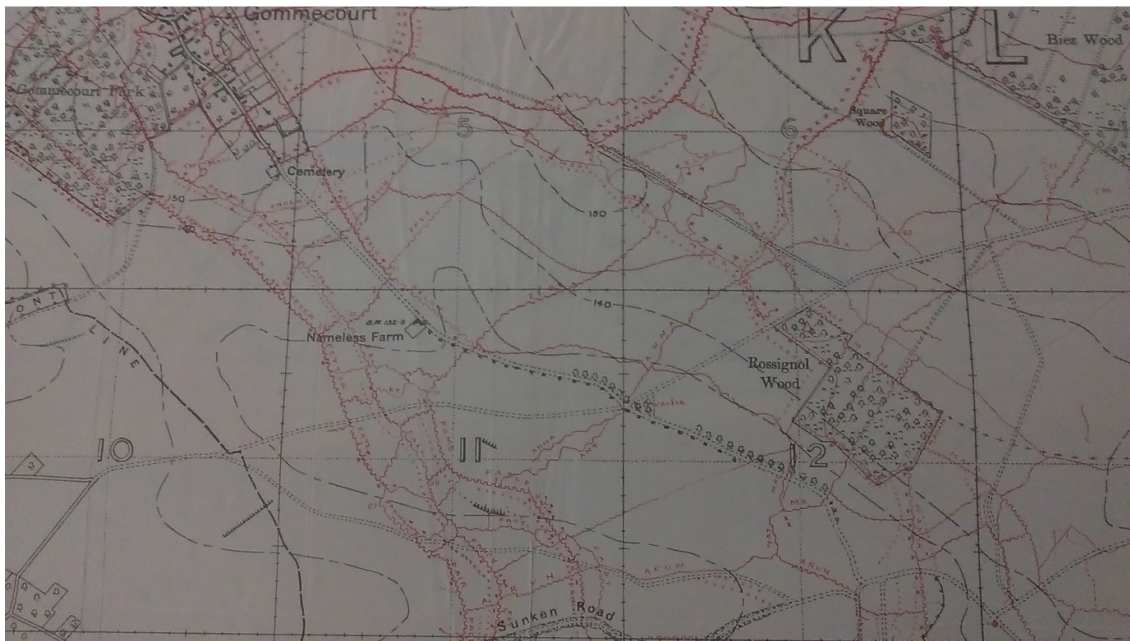
Effects £2618 14s. 10d. Former Grant Liverpool July 1918.



'Hamilton, R.A' is inscribed in the top left of the Panel situated on the right hand side of the cemetery.



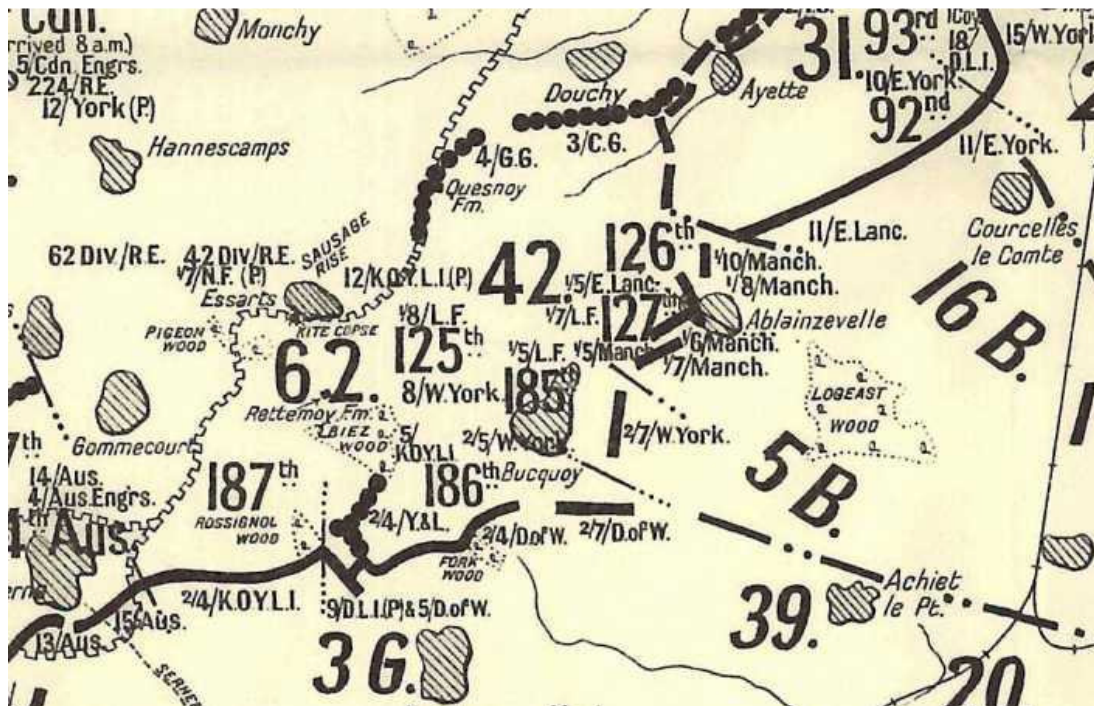
Overview of Pozieres Cemetery.



Trench Map showing Rossignol Wood. (Trenches are those of 1916)



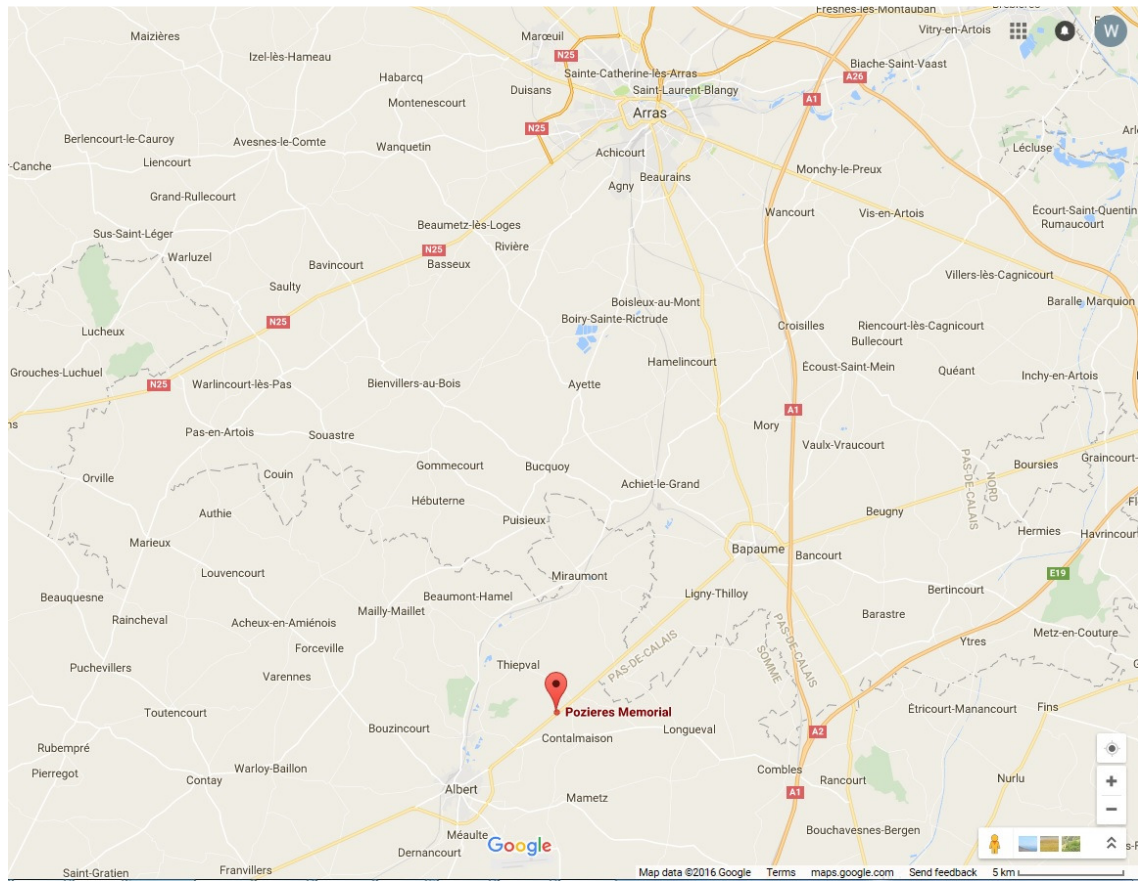
Modern terrain map of the same area



Map showing operations from The Official History of the War, Maps Volume.



Map showing surrounding villages of Gommecourt, Buchoy, Puisieux and Hebuterne



Map showing Northern Somme area including the location of the Pozieres Memorial



Rossignol Wood from the South West (German positions)



Remains of bunker with shell and wreath in Rossignol Wood looking South (Photographed in August 2016)



Remains of trenches in Rossignol Wood



Deep shaft in Rossignol Wood

Appendix

Medal Card of Robert Ainslie Hamilton

Name.	Corps.	Rank.	Regtl. No.
HAMILTON			
Robert Ainslie	asc	2/Lieut. X	
		Lieut. X	

Medal.	Roll.	Page.	Remarks.
116. VICTORY X	Off. 1.	256	Dec. d. 28 3/8 NW/6/22. d. 11/8/22. NW/6/22 959.
BRITISH	"		
15. STAR X	Off. 1	165.	
Theatre of War first served in	(1)		
Date of entry therein	21.11.15		
14.8.22			NW/6/22 959

K. 1380

Correspondence

Mr. Martin
 Address
 Executors of the late Dr. J. R. Hamilton,
 40 Menor Dawson & Co,
 2, New Square,
 Lincoln's Inn, W.C. 2

(1475) Wt. W2793/RP8142 1,000m 12P1 J.F.W. E 8281.



SECOND SUPPLEMENT

TO

The London Gazette

Of TUESDAY, the 7th of MAY, 1918.

Published by Authority.

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WEDNESDAY, 8 MAY, 1918.

War Office,

8th May, 1918

His Majesty the KING has been graciously pleased to approve of the award of the Victoria Cross to the undermentioned Officers, Non-Commissioned Officer and Men —

Maj (A/Lt-Col) Oliver Cyril Spencer Watson, DSO (R of O), late KO Yorks LI

For most conspicuous bravery, self-sacrificing devotion to duty, and exceptionally gallant leading during a critical period of operations

His command was at a point where continual attacks were made by the enemy in order to pierce the line, and an intricate system of old trenches in front, coupled with the fact that his position was under constant rifle and machine-gun fire, rendered the situation still more dangerous

A counter-attack had been made against the enemy position, which at first achieved its object, but as they were holding out in two improvised strong points, Lt-Col Watson saw that immediate action was necessary,

and he led his remaining small reserve to the attack, organising bombing parties and leading attacks under intense rifle and machine-gun fire

Outnumbered, he finally ordered his men to retire, remaining himself in a communication trench to cover the retirement, though he faced almost certain death by so doing

The assault he led was at a critical moment, and without doubt saved the line. Both in the assault and in covering his men's retirement, he held his life as nothing, and his splendid bravery inspired all troops in the vicinity to rise to the occasion and save a breach being made in a hardly tried and attenuated line

Lt-Col Watson was killed while covering the withdrawal

Capt (A/Lt-Col) Frank Crowther Roberts, DSO, MC, Wore R

During continuous operations which covered over twelve days Lt-Col Roberts showed most conspicuous bravery, exceptional military skill in dealing with the many very difficult situations of the retirement,



Victoria Cross



Lieutenant Colonel Oliver C S Watson who was educated at St Paul's School

Notes on Operations 21st March – 5th April by Major T Shearman

IV Corps.

5th K. O. Y. L. I.

NOTES ON OPERATIONS 21st MARCH – 5th APRIL 1918.

From sometime about 21st March to night of 25th/26th March, the 187th Infantry Brigade was attached to a division on Telegraph Hill, Arras, as a counter-attack brigade.

I was in command of 187th Inf. Bde. Details, and on night 25th/26th March we received orders to proceed to Buoquoy and there report to 62nd Division headquarters.

See First &
Third Armies,
28th March 1918,
p.21.

After reporting in Buoquoy we were located in old German dugouts at Gommecourt, all available personnel were ordered up from transport lines and Quartermasters' Stores, and were organized into parties as necessity arose and sent out to bomb back parties of the enemy who were filtering behind our lines through the gap in the low ground south of Gommecourt.

27th March 1918. I received information that Lieut.-Colonel O.C.S. Watson (afterwards awarded a posthumous V.C.) had been killed and that I was to report to 187th Brigade Headquarters near Gommecourt for orders before taking over command of the Battalion. After running the gauntlet through enemy rifle and shell-fire, and having received my orders from the Brigade Commander, I proceeded to Rattenoy Farm, arriving there about 3 p.m., and found the enemy occupying ground which we thought was occupied by the three companies of the battn., which proved to have been surrounded and captured.

/the I collected what men I could find that night and about 7 p.m. I was given orders to attack and clear the enemy away from Crucifix, situated in the low ground South of Gommecourt, and which was a strong post of the enemy and had resisted attacks several times before. I could not find enough men for the attack, and this being realised, my orders were cancelled.

28th March 1918. During the night I collected as many men as I could find and just before dawn, with a party of about thirty-eight (all we could then find of the Battn.), consisting mostly of runners, servants, signallers and stragglers, we proceeded to occupy the old German trench line West of Rossignol Wood, endeavouring to get in touch with the 2/4th K.O.Y.L.I. on the left and to try and get touch with the 4/Australian Brigade on our right, our object was to close up the gap which there was across the valley running South-east from Gommecourt, and along which numerous parties of the enemy had established themselves in posts. These parties were giving us much trouble by firing into our posts from the rear.

The enemy were firmly established at the Crucifix in this valley with advanced posts out between Gomecourt and Hebuterne, and although several attempts were made to take it the Crucifix remained in enemy hands for some days, and I think it was the Australians who finally took it.

See First and
Third Armies,
28th March 1918,
page 24.

As an illustration of how opposing troops were mixed up in the valley vicinity during this period, I would state that whilst I occupied a small frontage with the remains of the Batta. I could, after facing the enemy, turn directly round and fire into the rear of an enemy post some short distance behind. My men were able to harass the enemy with rifle and Lewis-gun fire, and inflicted many casualties, especially in the posts during reliefs of sentries.

It was whilst in this line of old trenches that we saw artillery unlimber somewhere near Hebuterne and it was only when we saw the direction in which their guns pointed that we knew that they were British.

On our right front we could observe a German battery which fired into Hebuterne, and we also saw at daybreak one morning the remains of an enemy camp or bivouac within a comparatively short distance of their line.

Whilst we were in this line our Regimental Sergeant-Major joined us one night, having been with the companies when they were captured, but had hidden himself during the days until the opportunity occurred to find his way back through the German lines under cover of darkness.

See First &
Third Armies,
29th March 1918,
page 9.

On, to the best of my recollection, the 29th March I received a reinforcement from the Labour Corps. This reinforcement started out with 5 officers and 150 other ranks and, owing to casualties, reached me with a strength of 2 officers and 80 men.

I utilised these men to extend our line to the South and so endeavour to get touch with the Australian troops somewhere on our right. Having a few German machine guns, I had these mounted in the line occupied by the Labour Corps and manned by our own men, the personnel of the Labour Corps being instructed in their use and the handling of same.

During the same day I also received a party of Motor Machine Gunners which were also disposed in an endeavour to fill up the gap through which the enemy had broken, and, through which they had filtered troops since we arrived in this particular sector.

Great credit was due to our Transport Section in being able to get supplies to us, having regard to our isolated and exposed position, and to the fact that there being no troops on our immediate right except isolated posts of the enemy.

(sgd) E. Shearman,
Major,
5th Batta. K.O.Y.L.I.

Doncaster,
27th May. 1931.

References:

Oundle Memorial Book of the Great War

[http://oundle-](http://oundle-heritage.daisy.websds.net/Filename.ashx?systemFileName=OUNRoH000000.pdf&origFilename=OUNRoH000000.pdf)

[heritage.daisy.websds.net/Filename.ashx?systemFileName=OUNRoH000000.pdf&origFilename=OUNRoH000000.pdf](http://oundle-heritage.daisy.websds.net/Filename.ashx?systemFileName=OUNRoH000000.pdf&origFilename=OUNRoH000000.pdf)

War Diary of 1/5 Battalion King's Own Yorkshire Light Infantry including Notes on Operations by T Shearman

Ref: WO 95/3091/2 , National Archives, Kew

Date: 1918 Feb. - 1919 Feb.

Trench Map showing Rossignol Wood

Ref: WO 297/259, National Archives, Kew

Medal card of Hamilton, Robert Amslie (sic)

Ref: WO 372/8/231033, National Archives, Kew

Commonwealth War Grave Commission:

[http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-](http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/1582006/HAMILTON,%20ROBERT%20AINSLIE)

[dead/casualty/1582006/HAMILTON,%20ROBERT%20AINSLIE](http://www.cwgc.org/find-war-dead/casualty/1582006/HAMILTON,%20ROBERT%20AINSLIE)

Movements of the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

<http://www.longlongtrail.co.uk/army/regiments-and-corps/the-british-infantry-regiments-of-1914-1918/kings-own-yorkshire-light-infantry/>

Map of operations from "Official History of the War" ("Military Operations France & Belgium 1918", maps volume

<http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?/topic/122627-photo-and-trench-map-request-bucquoy-mar-1918/>

1939 Register showing Robert Martin Household with Lylie Ethel and Kathleen Hamilton.

1841 and 1851 census showing Mary MacMillan at Glencrosh

Gravestone inscription of Robert Hamilton and Jane MacMillan at Carsphairn Parish Church.

<http://www.everymanremembered.org/profiles/soldier/1582006/>

Family tree at back of book created by Somerled MacMillan in the book 'The MacMillans and their Septs' (Glasgow, 1952).

Family tree of Andrew McAdam

<http://person.ancestry.co.uk/tree/11818025/person/26672268342/facts>

Author

William Bridge, August 2016

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(2nd cousin twice removed of Robert Ainslie Hamilton)