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:
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:
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 Hebuteune
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
SECOND SUPPLEMENT TO
The London Gazette
OF TUESDAY, the 7th of MAY, 1918.

Published by Authority.

The Gazette is registered at the General Post Office for transmission by Handled Post as a newspaper. The postage rate is twice the United Kingdom, for each copy, or use half-pay for the first 6.5s., and an additional half-pay for each subsequent 6s., or part thereof. For please abroad the rate to a half-pay for every 6s. or more, except in the case of Canada, in which the Canadian Newsagent Postage rate applies.

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 undeniably brave,41

Watson, D S O (R of O), I s K O Yorks

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 continuous attacks were made by the enemy in order to pierce the line, and an intense system of 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 improved strong points, Lt-Col Watson saw that immediate action was necessary, and he led his remaining small reserve to the attack, organizing 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 threatened line.

Lt-Col Watson was killed while covering the withdrawal.

Capt (A/Lt-Col) Frank Crowther Roberts, D S O, M C, 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 Arty. Bty., Ix.

NOTES ON OPERATIONS 21ST MARCH – 5TH APRIL 1918.

From sometime about 21st March to midnight of 24th/25th March, the 157th Infantry Brigade was attached to a division on Telegraph Hill, Arras, as a counter-attack brigade.

I was in command of 157th Inf. Bty. details, and on night 25th/26th March we received orders to proceed to Boucq and there report to 62nd Division headquarters.

After reporting in Boucq we were located in old German dugouts at Comenecourt, all available personnel were ordered up from transport lines and quartersmen’s stores, and were organised into parties as necessary areas 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 Comenecourt.

27th March 1918. I received information that Lieut.-Colonel C.C. Watson (afterwards awarded a posthumous V.C.) had been killed and that I was to report to 157th Brigade Headquarters near Commenecourt 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 Ateammy Farm, arriving there about 5 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.

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 Commenecourt, 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.

20th 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 Commenecourt, endeavoring to get in touch with the 6/4th B.C.I. on the left and to try and get touch with the Australian brigades on our right, our object was to close up the gap which there was across the valley running South-east from Commenecourt, and along which numerous parties of the enemy 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 Gommecourt and Hobuterne, 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.

As an illustration of how opposing troops were mixed up in the winning vicinity during this period, I would state that whilst I occupied a small frontage with the remains of the Battalion, 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 Hobuterne 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 Hobuterne, 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 a 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.

On 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 8 officers and 90 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 the 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.

(AGT) T. Shearman, 3rd Battalion, 5th Australian Field Artillery.

Dommartin, 27th May, 1918.
References:
Oundle Memorial Book of the Great War
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-dead/casualty/1582006/HAMILTON,%20ROBERT%20AINSLIE

Movements of the Kings Own Yorkshire Light Infantry

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

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 of Andrew McAdam
http://person.ancestry.co.uk/tree/11818025/person/26672268342/facts

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(2nd cousin twice removed of Robert Ainslie Hamilton)