

Corporal Alexis Ernest Paul Robinson[©]

Regimental number: 10704

2nd Battalion, Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers

born: June 1896–died: 9 August 1917

Corporal Alexis Ernest Paul Robinson was descended from a military career family. His father was James Robinson, born in Delhi, India, on 2 December 1858.¹ James was serving in South Africa with the 1st Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers when he married Mary Ann Jones at St. John's Church in the parish of Wynberg, Cape Province, on 20 September 1887.² Their marriage certificate indicates that James was a colour-sergeant³ at the time. Given his rank, it is likely that James was with the battalion when it was stationed in Hong Kong (1881–1883) and subsequently in the Straits Settlements⁴ for three years (1883–1886).⁵

Based on an article in the *Clifton Society* (a newspaper published in Bristol, England) on Thursday, 14 January 1897, Alexis was at least the fourth generation of the family to serve in the British Army:

A Family of Soldiers - A local clergyman writes: It may be interesting to Bristolians to know that there is living in this city a woman who was born in the army, and lived nearly the whole of her married life with the Service. She has witnessed the presentation of two sets of colours, once at Cawnpore and later at Jersey, these latter now being in Gloucester Cathedral. She has five sons, all of whom are serving in the Army, and who contribute to their mother's support. They are as follows: Staff Sergeant-Major John R. Robinson, of the Army Pay Corps; Quarter-Master James Robinson, permanent staff 4th Battalion Inniskillen [*sic*] Fusiliers; Corporal Sydney Robinson, ditto; Corporal Arthur Robinson, 2nd Battalion Inniskillen Fusiliers; and Private Alfred Robinson (quite a youth), Royal Marine Light Infantry, Plymouth Division. The deceased father served 26½ years. He enlisted in the 61st South Gloucester Regiment, in which he obtained his commission as Quarter-Master and Hon. Lieutenant after 18 years' service. This officer served through the Indian Mutiny, for which he got the medal, and was present at the storming of Delhi. The two eldest brothers wear the good conduct medal, and the fact that all but the boy-brother are non-commissioned officers testifies to their worth in the service.⁶

James and Mary Ann's first child, Arthur, was born about 1889 in Mauritius.⁷ Later in 1889 the small family was sent to England, where they would stay until 1893, when James was posted to Ireland. A second son, Alvan Reginald, was born on 3 March 1894 in Gortmore, Omagh, County Tyrone.⁸ Their third son, Alexis, was also born there on 22 May 1896.⁹ While still in Gortmore, James and Mary Ann had two more children: Violet Victoria, born on 25 October 1897¹⁰ and Edmund Garnett, born on 16 September 1899.¹¹

At some point between 1899 and 1901, the family moved approximately 45 kilometres from Gortmore to Enniskillen, County Fermanagh,¹² where Mary Ann gave birth to four more children: Alexandra May (b. 28 September 1901),¹³ Patricia Shelagh Hope (b. 4 October 1906),¹⁴ Charles Roger Norman (b. 13 March 1908),¹⁵ and Daphne Louise Stella Margaret (b. 11 November 1910).¹⁶ By the time his daughter Daphne was born, James Robinson had progressed to the rank of captain;¹⁷ he retired from active service as a major.¹⁸

Alexis's service number indicates that he joined the 2nd Battalion of the Royal Inniskilling Fusiliers, his father's old regiment, early in August 1914.¹⁹ The battalion, part of the 12th Brigade of the 4th Division of the British Expeditionary Force, landed at Le Havre in France on 22 August 1914 and was heavily involved in the Battle of Le Cateau just a few days later.²⁰

The battalion was attached to several other units between 1914 and 1916, including GHQ Troops (6 December 1914), the 5th Brigade of the 2nd Division (26 January 1915), Army Troops to the Third Army (22 July 1915), the 14th Brigade of the 5th Division (8 November 1915), and the 96th Brigade

of the 32nd Division (24 December 1915). It was attached to this last unit until 3 February 1918, when it was transferred to the 109th Brigade in the 36th (Ulster) Division.²¹

In addition to the Battle of Le Cateau, before Alexis died, his battalion also received battle honours for the Somme Offensive in 1916 and the Third Battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele.²² Unfortunately, no information was found about how Alexis may have been involved in any of these specific actions or any of those that are less renowned.

However, even routine assignments could be fatally dangerous: when Alexis was admitted to No. 1 Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 8 August 1917 with a skull fracture,²³ according to its war diary the battalion was "in billets at Ribaillet Camp and was employed on Working Parties in the line."²⁴

When he was injured, Alexis had a letter to or from (it is unclear) his sister, May.²⁵ Alexis died at 7:00 a.m. on 9 August 1917; he was buried the next day²⁶ in Adinkerke Military Cemetery, in the coastal region of West-Vlaanderen, Belgium, in plot A 19.²⁷

Alexis was awarded posthumously the British War Medal (for service overseas between 1914 and 1918), the Victory Medal (for service in an operational theatre) and the 1914–15 Star (for service in the war against Germany between 5 August 1914 and 31 December 1915).²⁸

Except for five years between 1920²⁹ and 1925,³⁰ which most of the family spent in South Africa, Alexis's family appears to have settled in England.

Only their son Edmund was recorded in the electoral register with **James** and **Mary Ann** in 1926; they were living at 10 Springwell Avenue, Willesden West, London.³¹ The family was still at this address in 1934 when, in addition to Edmund, Daphne and Patricia are listed.³²

By 1939, when James and Mary Ann had moved to 21 Leaside Crescent, Hendon (part of Greater London since 1965),³³ only Edmund and Daphne were living with them.³⁴ James died in the fall of 1942 and was buried in Hendon Cemetery on 2 November 1942.³⁵ Mary Ann, who died three years later, was buried with her husband on 29 December 1945.³⁶

According to a descendant of the Robinson family, Alexis's eldest brother, **Arthur**, also died during the war. No documentary evidence could be found to confirm this; other than his birth and his presence in his father's household in 1901, no other records were found for Arthur.

Alexis's next brother, **Alvan**, died of shock on 2 March 1911 after one of his legs was amputated due to tubercular disease and sepsis; he was just 17 years old.³⁷

No confirmed records could be found for Alexis's sister **Violet** after her passage to South Africa in February 1920. It is possible that she passed away shortly after arrival: a Violet Victoria Robinson, born in Ireland, aged 22, died in Mowbray-Rondebosch, Cape Province, on 24 April 1920.³⁸

Edmund, known in the family as **Garnett**, enlisted with the 19th (London) Battalion of the Middlesex Regiment on 19 September 1917 but was released on medical grounds on 2 April 1918.³⁹ Garnett married Margaret Morrison in Hendon in July 1939;⁴⁰ according to the Robinson family, the couple had a daughter, Wendy, born about 1940. Garnett and his wife remained in Hendon until at least 1956⁴¹ but by 1963 they were again living in Willesden.⁴² Garnett died in the fall of 1979;⁴³ no further information could be found about Margaret.



Figure 1: Grave marker for Corporal Alexis Ernest Paul Robinson

Source: "Global, Find a Grave Index for Burials at Sea and Other Select Burial Locations, 1300s–Current," *Ancestry.com*

It is possible that Alexis's sister, known as **May** or sometimes as Dolly,⁴⁴ suffered from a mental illness: an Alexandra May Robinson is listed as a patient in the West Park Hospital, a psychiatric hospital on the Horton Estate in Epsom, Surrey,⁴⁵ in 1939.⁴⁶ This person died there on 17 February 1945 and is buried in the Horton Estate Cemetery.⁴⁷ It is not conclusive that this record refers to Alexis's sister, as the date of birth on these records is 1903 rather than 1901.

Patricia Robinson, known as **Sheila**, married Arthur Raymond Cynderyn Griffiths in January 1939;⁴⁸ the couple had one son, Evan, born two years later.⁴⁹ Sheila passed away on 17 June 1981,⁵⁰ and her husband died on 16 September 1990.⁵¹

What happened to the youngest of James and Mary Ann's sons, **Charles Roger Norman**, is not clear. The passenger lists of the family's trips to and from South Africa do not include him, though he would have been a few weeks shy of his twelfth birthday when they left England. No evidence was uncovered to indicate that Charles died as a child.

The Robinson family think that Charles may indeed have gone to South Africa and remained there after the rest of the family returned to England; however, Charles's name could not be found on outward bound passenger lists. The only records found that possibly relate to Charles are British marriage index entries: one, in January 1954, when a Charles R. N. Robinson married Pamela A. Mulliss in Bedfordshire;⁵² and another, in January 1980, when he married Rose M. Brown, also in Bedfordshire.⁵³

Alexis's sister **Daphne** married Richard Anthony Tannyane;⁵⁴ they had three daughters, Pamela (b. 1940),⁵⁵ Elizabeth (b. 1944)⁵⁶ and Patricia (b. 1947).⁵⁷ Daphne and Richard were divorced in the 1950s;⁵⁸ Daphne remained in the Greater London area until her death on 21 April 1999.⁵⁹

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Reference Notes

¹ Documentary evidence provided by the Robinson family.

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³ In British Army infantry battalions, a colour sergeant is a company quartermaster-sergeant. Source: "British Army Ranks," *National Army Museum* (www.nam.ac.uk: accessed 13 October 2020).

⁴ The Straits Settlements were part of the Malay Archipelago awarded to the British by the Anglo-Dutch Treaty of 1824. At the time, the Settlements included Singapore, Penang, Malacca and Dinding; Christmas Island and the Cocos Islands were added in 1886. Source: "Straits Settlements," *Wikipedia* (www.wikipedia.org: accessed 13 October 2020).

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- ¹⁶ "Civil Records–Birth," *Irish Genealogy* (www.irishgenealogy.ie: accessed 10 September 2020), entry for Daphne Louise Stella Margaret Robinson.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ "1939 England and Wales Register," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 14 October 2020), entry for James Robinson, Enumeration district: BKDV, Borough: Hendon, Registration district: 1303.
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- ²⁹ "UK and Ireland, Outward Passenger Lists, 1890–1960," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.com: accessed 19 October 2020), entry for Major J Robinson, Official Number: 118350. Travelling with him from Southampton to Cape Town were his wife, Mary Ann, and his children Edmund Garnett, Violet Victoria, Daphne, Alexandra May and Patricia.
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