2nd Lieutenant George Edward Ffrench
Regimental Number: 91995
27th Squadron, Royal Air Force

born: 5 June 1899 - died: 23 May 1918

George Edward Ffrench was born on 5 June 1899[1] at Shinrone Rectory[2] near Roscrea, Ireland.[3] He was the first child of the Very Rev. Le Bel Holbrooke Edward Ffrench (born in England about 1861) and Sydney Constance Violet Stanistreet (born in County Galway about 1863).[4] [5] His father was a rector in the Church of Ireland. George had five siblings: two brothers (Harold Acheson, who was born in 1903,[6] but died the same year,[7] and Ernest Frederic Randal, born in 1912)[8] and three sisters Lily Nicola, born in 1904,[9] Violet Hilda, born Jun 1906,[10] and Gwendolen Alice, born in 1908).[11]

In 1911, George was a pupil at the College of Chesterfield at Donegrone in Birr, King's County, Ireland. He went on to Trent College, Derbyshire,[12] where his father had also studied.[13]

2nd Lt George Edward Ffrench, "Our Heros"[16]

He was in the Rifle Corps and was reportedly one of the best shots in the Corps.[14] He enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps on 14 August 1917, when he was just 18 years old, as an Air Mechanic 3rd Class. He was also shown as "G41 Student (S)." This may mean that he was being trained using the Gosport System – a system that taught pilots not only how to avoid dangerous manoeuvres, but also how to recover from them. The Gosport system of training, taught at the School of Special Flying at the Grange Airfield in Gosport, Hampshire, was adopted at training schools throughout the world and was the dominant method of civil and military flight instruction into the jet age.[15]

On 17 September 1917, he was declared "fit as pilot."[17] On 5 December 1917, he was discharged when he received a temporary commission as a 2nd Lieutenant (on probation) for duty with the Royal Flying Corps.[18] He completed his probation on 15 February 1918. Between September 1917 and March 1918, he attended a number of training schools. In March 1918, he obtained his "wings" and was immediately sent to France with the Royal Flying Corps.[19]

On 1 April 1918, the Royal Flying Corp combined with the Royal Navy Air Service to form the Royal Air Force.[20]

> ... the newly independent RAF fought effectively from 1 April 1918 over the Western Front in direct support of the ground forces. It also took the war to Germany and exploited the offensive potential of air power ... The RAF's performance over the Western Front was crucial, both in the part it played in blunting the German offensive and in the final counter-attacks of the Allied Armies which led to the surrender of the German forces in November 1918. The bitterness and scale of air fighting remained undiminished from April until November. For example, RAF Communiqué No 1 records that 57 enemy aircraft were brought down, 37 were driven out of control, 7 lost to anti-aircraft fire while RAF losses were 43; and 85

> tons of bombs were dropped, 380,173 rounds fired at ground targets and 3302 photographs were taken.[21]

George Edward Ffrench in Pernes cemetery (Source: Author, July 2015)

In the short period of his active service George was "in several engagements, and was mentioned in the confidential report of the Air Force as having brought down a German machine."[22] Unfortunately, like so many other RAF pilots in World War I, his time as a pilot was very short. His plane crashed in mid-May 1918, just a couple of months after he left for France. "No 27 Squadron lost DH9 D5616 on 23 May 1918, 2nd Lt George Edward Ffrench and Cpl Francis Yates McLauchlan both being killed."[23]

George was flying a DH9, made by de Havilland – a plane that did not have a good track record. "The DH.9's performance in action over the Western Front was a disaster, with heavy losses incurred, both due to its poor performance and to engine failures, despite the prior de-rating of its engine."[24] The account of their accident reflects the aircraft failure:

> From Henshaw's "The Sky Their Battlefield" [Ffrench] was piloting his DH9 No: D5616 with Cpl F Y McLauchlan as his observer when the engine fell off at about 6:10 a.m. near Maria Aeltre, having left the aerodrome at Fourneuil, where Number 27 squadron was based at the time. His observer was also killed.[25]

The plane crashed near Sains-lè-Pernes[26] and George was already dead when he was admitted to the 1st Canadian Casualty Clearing Station on 23 May 1918. He was buried four days later in the Pernes British Military Cemetery (Plot 2, Row C, Grave 45), with the chaplain, J. K. Tibbits, presiding.[27] His observer and gunner, Sergeant Francis Yate McLauchlan,[28] was also admitted to the 1st CCCS and was buried in Pernes British Military Cemetery next to George (Plot 2, Row C, Grave 44).[29]

George's next-of-kin were his parents, who, when he died, were living at the Kilconnell Rectory, Ballinasloe in County Galway.

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[1] "The Peerage" (http://www.thepeerage.com/p38630.htm#i386294: accessed 25 January 2015), Person Page - 38630

[2] "Our Heros" (http://ourheroes.southdublinlibraries.ie/node/17503: accessed 26 January 2015), entry for Second Lieutenant George Edward Ffrench

[3] "Ireland, Civil Registration Births Index, 1864-1958," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 January 2015), entry for George Edward Ffrench, Registration district: Roscrea, Volume: 3, Page: 478, FHL Film Number: 101067

[4] "Web: Ireland, Census, 1911," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 25 January 2015), entry for Lebel Holbrooke Edward Ffrench, District: Kilconnell, County: Galway

[5] "Ireland, Civil Registration Marriages Index, 1845-1958," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 25 January 2015), entry for Le Bel Holbrook E Ffrench, Registration district: Scarriff, Volume: 4, Page Number: 181, FHL Film Number: 101259
[6] "Ireland, Civil Registration Births Index, 1864-1958," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 January 2015), entry for Harold Acheson Ffrench, Registration district: Roscrea, Volume: 3, Page: 456, FHL Film Number: 101069
[7] "Ireland, Civil Registration Deaths Index, 1864-1958." *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 25 January 2015), entry for Harold A Ffrench, Registration district: Roscrea, Volume: 3, Page: 378, FHL Film Number: 101602
[8] "Ireland, Civil Registration Births Index, 1864-1958," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 January 2015), entry for Ernest E. F. Ffrench, Registration district: Ballinasloe, Volume: 4, Page: 28, FHL Film Number: 101074
[9] Ireland, Civil Registration Births Index, 1864-1958," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 January 2015), entry for Lily Nicola Pagan Ffrench, Registration district: Roscrea, Volume: 3, Page: 423, FHL Film Number: 101070
[10] Ireland, Civil Registration Births Index, 1864-1958," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 January 2015), entry for Violet Hilda Ffrench, Registration district: Roscrea, Volume: 2, Page: 423, FHL Film Number: 101071
[11] Ireland, Civil Registration Births Index, 1864-1958," *Ancestry* (www.ancestry.co.uk: accessed 26 January 2015), entry for Gwendolen Alice Ffrench, Registration district: Roscrea, Volume: 3, Page: 445, FHL Film Number: 101072
[12] "Our Heros," entry for Second Lieutenant George Edward Ffrench
[13] "The Peerage" (http://www.thepeerage.com/p38630.htm#i386294: accessed 25 January 2015), Person Page - 38630
[14] "Our Heros," entry for Second Lieutenant George Edward Ffrench
[15] "Gosport Information: Flying History Grange Airfield" (http://www.gosport.info/History/Flying_History/flying_history.html: accessed 27 January 2015)
[16] Ibid.
[17] "British Royal Air Force, Officers' Service Records 1912-1920," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 26 January 2015), entry for George Edward Ffrench
[18] "British Royal Air Force, Airmen's service records 1912-1939," *Findmypast* (www.findmypast.co.uk: accessed 26 January 2015), entry for George Edward Ffrench
[19] "Our Heros," entry for Second Lieutenant George Edward Ffrench
[20] "A Short History of the Royal Air Force: Chapter 1 - The Early Years of Military Flight," (http://www.raf.mod.uk/history/shorthistoryoftheroyalairforce.cfm: accessed 24 January 2015), p. 26
[21] Ibid., p 28 - 29
[22] "Our Heros," entry for Second Lieutenant George Edward Ffrench
[23] "The Aerodrome Forum," http://www.theaerodrome.com/forum/showthread.php?t=57730: accessed 24 January 2015.
[24] "Wikipedia: Airco DH.9," (http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Airco_DH.9: accessed 24 January 2015)
[25] "Great War Forum: Ffrench, George Edward. Died 1918 RAF http://1914-1918.invisionzone.com/forums/index.php?showtopic=123958: accessed 25 January 2015
[26] "The Aerodrome Forum" (http://www.theaerodrome.com/forum/archive/index.php/t-20888.html: accessed 27 January 2015. Note: McLauchlan was actually a Sergeant by this date.
[27] "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Library and Archives Canada, (records accessed 2013 & 2014), Record Group 9, series IIIC10, volume 4556, Record number 524
[28] Sergeant Francis Yates McLauchlan, born in 1898, was the son of Duncan and Barbara Ellen McLauchlan of Leeds, Yorkshire. He enlisted in the Royal Flying Corps in 1916, but was deemed unfit to be a pilot.
[29] "Record of Deaths, 17 February 1916 - 10 February 1919, a record maintained at No. 1 CCCS," Library and Archives Canada, (records accessed 2013 & 2014), Record Group 9, series IIIC10, volume 4556, Record number 523