

# FRANK LAWRENCE FULTON

Cpl. 550330 2/16<sup>th</sup> London Regiment (Queens Westminster Rifles)

Died of wounds, March 17<sup>th</sup> 1917, Karasouli, Greece

With both his father, George Edmonston Fulton and brother, Arthur George, multiple Bisley winners, it was scarcely surprising that Frank Fulton was a shooting instructor by the time he was seventeen. His father had begun target shooting when he joined the Wimbledon Rifle Volunteers in 1881 at the age of twenty four. Seven years later he was a Queens Prize winner, founding his gun dealing business first at Wandsworth, where Frank, the youngest of the family was born, then at Staines. George became a gunsmith in 1895, moving ten years later to one of the verandah huts re-erected at Bisley when the National Rifle Association moved there from Wimbledon, to this day a business under the same name of G.E.Fulton & Son in the same building.

In the census of March 31st 1901, the family was living in Clarendon Road, Ashford, consisting of parents George and Isabella Lansdown Fulton, with oldest child Ethel, born in 1886, who would later marry Richard de Rupe Roche, killed in 1915 ([see his biography](#)) and three brothers, Arthur George, age 13, Harold Edmond, 10 and Frank Lawrence, the baby, only three years old.

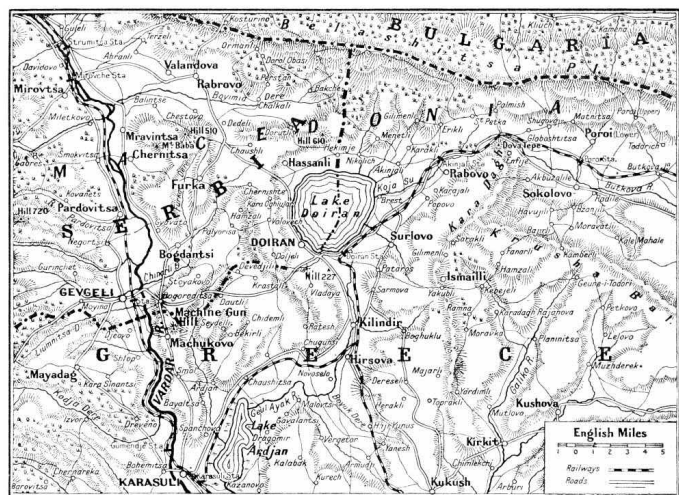
At some time between 1905 and 1911 they moved to 4, Victoria Villas in Connaught Road, Brookwood, although George was not at home on census night, but staying at a hotel in Torrington, Devon, no doubt on business. By then, 23-year-old son Arthur had also become a gunsmith, but his brother Harold had already left these shores for a new life as a farmer in Canada. Frank was still a schoolboy at the time, but neither at Pirbright nor Brookwood. Back in the 1880s, as well as the Wimbledon Rifles there were a number of other South London Volunteers and George was persuaded to join the Queens Westminster Rifles, who later came to shoot at Bisley. Come the Great War, then, it was no surprise that his two sons would join up at the outset in the Queens Westminster Rifles. More unusual was that their father would also volunteer for service at the age of 57, but his great experience would turn out to be invaluable as an armourer. George, son Arthur and son-in-law Richard Roche joined the 1/16th Battalion of the London Regiment, the latter two, given their sharp-shooting rifle background, surprisingly attached to the Machine Gun Section.

Frank signed up on August 4th at the declaration of war, no doubt eager to “do his bit” before the war was “over by Christmas”. The 2/16th Londons (Queens Westminster Rifles) would have a very different and rather less glorious war than their 1st counterparts. A second line Territorial Battalion, it was formed at Somerset House in September from troops of the 1st who had not volunteered to serve overseas, eager but untrained young men like Frank (only just 17) and older married men. Like most new units at this time, they had to endure the frustration of the lack of almost all the necessary to become soldiers.

The recently built White City had to be pressed into service as a temporary barracks for the 2/4th London Brigade. Training took place in Richmond Park, Wimbledon Common and trench

digging was on Hampstead Heath. Uncomfortable it may have been, but tents at Maidstone in January 1915 would have been a great deal more disagreeable. Their first rifles, a Japanese model with only 100 rounds of ammunition each, started to arrive that month and the 2/16th marched with them to camps at Cassiobury Park, Watford in April and Saffron Walden in June. By January 1916, now well-trained, preparations began for overseas service at Sutton Veny, Wiltshire, but when orders came at the end of April to proceed to Cork and Limerick, it was a deeply unpopular move; the natives, though hostile, no substitute for “biffing the Boche”. Fortunately the Irish rebellion was almost over, so less than three weeks later the battalion was back at Warminster preparing to go to France, which they did at the end of June.

From Le Havre, the 60th Division travelled by train twenty miles east of Arras before marching in stormy weather to trenches at the front just south of Vimy Ridge. Compared to the great battle then raging on the Somme to the south, this was a relatively quiet sector after a successful German attack in June but there was a constant threat of strafing from Minnies, the German trench mortars. In retaliation, no doubt Frank would have put his marksmanship to good use as a sniper. Here they stayed for the next four months before handing over to the Canadians, who would cover themselves in glory in spring the following year by gaining the famous (and infamous) Vimy Ridge.



The 2nd /16th Westminsters now received orders to proceed to the Balkans. After more training they travelled by train to Marseilles with the Division and on via Malta to a so-called “assault” landing on Christmas Day at Katerini, about forty miles southwest of Salonika, the Greeks still being technically neutral. For three months this became a “cushy number”, passing the time in sports, with the officers going shooting, but this would end in early March when news came that the Greeks had rejoined the Allies and orders were to march the hundred miles through the Vardar marshes to the Doiran – Vardar River

front, in present-day Macedonia (*see map left*). Private Lewis Jones of the battalion recalled that during this march some of the men bought sheep bells from Greek farmers and sang “The bells of hell go ding-a-ling-ding for you, but not for me”.

Preparations for yet another battle over this hotly contested ground were going ahead. The Allies were convinced that Germany could be outflanked by defeating the Bulgarians and advancing through the soft underbelly of Europe. Easier said than done. In three successive years they tried, 1916 and 1917, only succeeding in late 1918 when it was clear that the end of the war was in sight. Although outnumbered on each occasion, the Bulgarians had two advantages. The first was the terrain. Occupying the mountains, they could observe all movements and bring down fire on the Allies on the hilly plain below. The second was General Vladimir Vazov, the wily and formidable commander of the Plevna Infantry Division.

At Karasouli, about twelve miles short of the front, the Queens Westminsters had to wait until after dark to enter because previous units had been shelled. There was a severe storm with flooding, so next day they had to proceed in single file through knee-deep water in the narrow Vardar valley, when stores were lost and it snowed. On arrival at the front they discovered the trenches were either non-existent or only 18 inches deep, so it was hardly surprising that they took heavy casualties from shellfire. Frank Fulton was one of these, being wounded and then evacuated via Field Hospital back to Karasouli, where he died and was buried (*see right*). In the ensuing battle at the end of April and beginning of May, although not on the same scale as the carnage on the Western Front, the Bulgarians lost just 2,000 casualties from a strength of 30,000. The British lost 12,000 out of 43,000 and were forced to withdraw, tails between their legs.



The grim news of Frank's death, the second in the family, would have reached his father and brother during the German retreat to the Hindenberg Line south of Arras. As Battalion Sergeant Armourer, George would have been some way back from the line, but miraculously, for a machine gunner, Arthur would also survive the war, winning the D.C.M., to continue the gunsmith's business with his father and in the inter-war period win three Sovereign's prizes, a unique achievement. He had married in 1916 with two children. Son Robin continued the family tradition by winning the Queens Prize in 1958. Arthur, who lived at Oak Cottage, Bisley, just in the parish of Pirbright, was awarded the M.B.E. in 1959 and died in 1972. His father died in 1943; both were 75 at their deaths. See headstones for the Fulton family [here](#).