

Lieutenant RP Alderson, *Croix de Guerre*, 1919 -1942



Raymond Pasteur Alderson (known to family, friends and colleagues as Nik) was born in **Reigate**, Surrey, the son of Marguerite (nee Pasteur) and Gerald Alderson, a physician and surgeon who later became consultant to Priors House Nursing Home, 51 Lillington Road.

Dr Alderson's profession led to several house moves before the family settled at Dudley House, Abbey Hill, Kenilworth, then **Leamington**, where Raymond and his younger brother John attended Greyfriars Preparatory School (at Beech Lawn, Warwick Place, once the home of Dr Jephson) and Arnold Lodge School in Kenilworth Road, then finally settling at The Cottage, Offchurch. After Arnold Lodge, Nik boarded at Stowe School and followed his father to Caius College Cambridge.

In World War II he became a conscientious objector and joined the French Army as an ambulance driver for the **Free French** Forces. He died on active service in **Libya** in February 1942, and was awarded the Croix de Guerre.

On a French website can be found a tribute to Nik, clearly held in very high esteem by his colleagues, *"It was while the Hospital was at **Tobruk** that the section received its greatest blow of all. On 14th February news came from the Forward Theatre that Nik Alderson had been killed."*

Nik was killed instantly by a German bomb which hit the slit trench where he was sheltering, a brief respite from what he described as, *"some of the hardest and most satisfying work we have done since the Unit came out; working in a filthy hospital among tired and understaffed personnel doing a really splendid job which has been much appreciated."*



El Azragh février 1942 - Simone Buterne, Louise Marie Lemanissier, Alderson, Fruchaud, Schick, Boillot

Nik is 3rd from left above, wearing a cap



The tribute continues, *"It was Nik more than anyone else who had made the group and brought to it the unity and strength which lasted throughout the four and a half years of the section's life. He had **courage** and a **genius for friendship**. Only a month or two before he died, he had decided to resign his leadership of the section in order to return to the clinics in Syria, where his heart was. While still in Syria he had written in his diary, "This medical mission has given me an idea to work for; it has made tomorrows and filled the days, I have been given new impetus by it."*

In 1946, four years after Nik's death, on a house fitted up as a permanent clinic at the village of Tel, north of **Damascus**, a plaque was placed with an inscription in Arabic, "*This Medical Clinic is dedicated to the memory of Raymond Alderson of the Friends Ambulance Unit, to whose inspiration the origin of the Spears Mobile Clinics was largely due. Raymond Alderson was killed in the Western Desert in 1942.*" It was considered the memorial which Nik himself would have most liked.



Lieutenant Raymond Pasteur Alderson is commemorated at Knightsbridge War Cemetery, near **Tobruk**; at St Mary Magdalene's Church, **Lillington**, on the grave of his brother John who died aged 11 in 1933; and on the font at St Gregory's Church, **Offchurch**, alongside two other local men, Walter Barnwell and Peter Mattinson. (The Alderson family were living at Offchurch at the time of Nik's death.)

At the foot of the memorial the epitaph reads,
'One of many who perished not in vain, As a type of our chivalry.'

Jeff Alderson, Nik's much younger brother (b. 1934) lives in Oxfordshire. His family photographs (top and third above) show Nik and John in the garden at Abbey Hill, and Nik on active service with his colleagues.

Margaret Rushton (June 2015)

Based on personal research and information and photographs supplied by Jeffrey G Alderson

Links

- Raymond's father, Gerald Alderson, became a prominent local freemason and Warwick Masonic rooms are named after him. <http://www.aldersonhouse.co.uk/history.htm>
- 'The Free French, from June 1940 to July 1943.'
<http://www.francaislibres.net/liste/fiche.php?index=50856>
- The story of the Friends Ambulance Unit and the Hadfield Spears Hospital.
<http://ourstory.info/library/4-ww2/Friends/fau04.html>