

VETERAN OF THE WEEK 19

(22 August – 27 August, 2022)

Lt. Col./ The Honourable Judge William Oswald Smyth



Lieutenant Colonel William Oswald Smyth was born on the 4th of October 1873 in Toronto, York, Ontario to William John Smyth and Sarah Bagshaw. He grew up in Quebec where he began his long and storied careers in the military, public service, and politics. Lt. Col. Smyth had begun his military career when he served 3 years in the Montreal High School Cadets. He then went on to serve one year with the 6th Fusiliers (Montreal), two years with the Duke of Connaught Rangers, and 7 years with the 27th Light Horse, where he was the squadron commander of the Swift Current Squadron.

He ran for office in the 1908 Saskatchewan General Election as a candidate for the Swift Current District seat representing the Saskatchewan Provincial Rights Party, a successor party to the North West Territories Conservative Party. Unfortunately, he lost the election to the Saskatchewan Liberal Party candidate named Walter Scott. He lost by 298 votes (63.6 % to 36.5%). Lt. Col. Smyth was a lawyer and judge by trade. He was one of the first lawyers and judges in the Swift Current area as he was appointed as Judge of the Swift Current District on the 22nd of August 1913.

Due to his position as a sitting judge, Smyth was unable to go overseas with the 27th Light Horse when war was declared and the unit was mobilized in 1914. The Swift Current squadron was led overseas by Major Van Allen of Shaunavon. Lt. Col. Smyth then petitioned the Minister of Militia and the Dominion Government for permission to raise a southwest Saskatchewan battalion for overseas duty. The unit he petitioned for would become known as 209th Overseas "Swift Current" Battalion.

Lt. Col. Smyth received permission to raise the battalion in early February 1916 and was one of the first men to enlist in the new battalion as he enlisted in the 209th on the 4th of February 1916. Smyth served as the first and only Officer Commanding of the 209th Battalion during its short operational life as he had been promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel in October of 1914. This time when it came time for the 209th to go overseas to England, Lt. Col. Smyth defied the standing order that he not proceed overseas with the unit and left with the 209th for Liverpool via Halifax aboard the S.S. Caronia on the night of the 31st of October/ morning of the 1st of November, 1916. Arriving in Liverpool on the 11th of November that same year.

Like the rest of the men of his battalion he was transferred to the 9th Reserve Battalion and the General List for quarters, rations, and discipline on the 5th of December 1916 (located at St. Martin Plain). Not much latter on the 26th of January 1917 Lt. Col. Smyth received a letter containing orders and disciplinary words from the Canadian Minister of Justice, ordering the Lt. Col. to return home to Canada at once. He being caught defying the standing orders that a sitting judge cannot serve on overseas duties as it would interfere with his duties as a judge.

With his war over Lt. Col. W.O. Smyth sailed home to Canada aboard the S.S. Scotian. He eventually retired from being a Judge in the early 1940's and remarried as his first wife Frances Leta Smyth passed in 1935. (Remarried to Marian Anna Mantle in Whatcom Co., Washington, U.S.A.). He retired to Vancouver, British Columbia where he was living at the time of his passing. Lt. Col. William Oswald Smyth passed away on the 4th of March 1947 at the age of 73 years due to a myriad of issues such as cystitis, pyelitis, arteriosclerosis, and complications due to diabetes. He would be cremated three days latter on the 7th of March 1947.

This week we honour the service of one of Swift Currents most prominent citizens, Lieutenant Colonel William Oswald Smyth. Thank you for your service, Lt. Col. W.O. Smyth.

Lest We Forget.