

VETERAN OF THE WEEK 29

(7 – 13 November, 2022)

Lieutenant Colonel William Milwarde Yates

32nd & 2nd Battalions

Canadian Expeditionary Force

First World War

Lt. Col. William (Wilton) Milwarde Yates was born on the 17th of October 1879 in New Broford, Nottingham, England to Mr. and Mrs. W. Yates. Yates was a rancher by trade and a veteran of the Boer War (South African War) as he had served two years with the Western Light Horse and the 37th Canadian Militia. At the age of thirty-five, Lt. Col. Yates enlisted with the 32nd Overseas Battalion on the 29th of December 1914, in Winnipeg, Manitoba. He was unmarried at time of his enlistment, and as such, his next of kin was listed as being his father Mr. W. Yates of Apperly Bridge, York, England. Originally, he had been appointed as a Captain in the 32nd Battalion, but it was not long as he was soon promoted to the rank of Major. Then, Lt. Col. Yates sailed for duty overseas, sailing from Halifax aboard the S.S. Vaderland on the 23rd of February 1915. That May (1915-05-02) he arrived in France for duty at the front.

On the 5th of May he was taken on strength of the 2nd Battalion. That October he got married to his wife Gladys Lillian Yates (1915-10-16). She would later be listed as his next of kin on his pay documents. He would be granted leave back to Canada on the 20th of March 1916 till, the 26th of June 1916, and rejoined his battalion on the 8th of July that same year. Three months later, on the 25th of October, Yates was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant Colonel and was given command of the 2nd Battalion. He then proceeded to attend a five-day Commanding Officers Course (1916-11-20-1916-11-25). Two days later a life changing event would occur, Lt. Col. Yates was seriously injured when the bus he was riding on overturned. The Lt. Col. suffered from severe head and facial trauma, including a fractured skull, fractured nasal bones, and many contusions to his face.

The injuries were so grievous, that by Yates own omission in a later medical board document, he stated his brain oozed from the wound to his head at the time of the injury. Lt. Col. Yates was initially treated at No. 6 Casualty Clearing Station, then was admitted to No. 24 General Hospital Etapes on the 16th of December 1916. Originally, the cause of injury was stated as being a gunshot wound to the head and face, but was later changed to the correct event of an accident (bus overturning). On the 20th of December that same year, he would be invalided back to England for further treatment of his injuries. Once in England, he was admitted to the Endleigh Palace Hospital in Endleigh (1916-12-21), where he stayed until being discharged on the 23rd of January 1917.

On the 18th of March 1917 he was admitted to Cambridge Hospital in Aldershot, in which he stayed until the 7th of May 1917. While in hospital he had facial reconstruction surgery conducted by a Major Gilles. In order to fix the damage to his nasal bones and trephine opening, Major Gilles grafted one of his ribs to the area. In total Lt. Col. Yates would undergo six different operations in order to repair the damage to his head and face done by the accident. Even after undergoing these operations Yates would continue to suffer from constant headaches, memory loss, insomnia, vertigo, and nervousness. He also would have a large scar that crossed his forehead, and various other smaller facial scars.

From the 7th of May 1917 till the 7th of August 1917, he was granted leave by a medical board. The leave was extended to the 16th of December that same year. His extended leave allowed him to return to Canada for a bit. Upon his return from leave, on the 10th of December that same year he rejoined the East Ontario Regimental Depot. Next Lt. Col. Yates was made President of Officers at the Canadian Special Hospital located at Broadstairs (1918-01-02-1918-04-02). He then would serve with the Canadian Discharge Depot (C.D.D.) in Buxton for a short time. Lt. Col. Yates then proceeded to serve back in Canada until his discharge from the C.E.F. on the 15th of October 1919 via reason of General Demobilization.

Lt. Col. William Milwarde Yates was awarded the British War Medal and the Victory Medal. He also had a street in Swift Current named in his honour, Yates St. In addition, Lt. Col. Yates owned the Swift Current Sun newspaper when it was moved from Maple Creek to Swift Current. This him a staple of the Swift Current community. Lt. Col. Yates would pass away on the 6th of December 1976, at the age of 97 years old. He is buried in Plot M-29 at St. Mary's Cemetery, Metchosin, British Columbia. This week we honour the service of Lt. Col. William Milwarde Yates. Thank you for your service, Lt. Col. Yates.

Lest We Forget.