

RESTING IN PEACE FAR FROM HOME
LIEUTENANT DOUGLAS CHRISTIE WRIGHT
18th BATTALION, CANADIAN INFANTRY ATTACHED ROYAL FLYING CORPS.

Douglas Christie Wright was born on the 12th September 1895, in Toronto, Ontario, Canada, the second son of John Douglas Wright and Lilian St Claire of 98 Highland Avenue, Toronto. He was educated at St Andrew's College, an independent school founded in 1899. Originally located in Toronto, the college, a university preparatory school for 10 to 18 year old boys, moved in 1926 to Aurora, approximately 40-kilometres from Toronto.

Prior to the outbreak of the First World War, Douglas was a student studying to become a chartered accountant. As with thousands of men and women across the world the outbreak of war interrupted their lives. At the age of 20 years and 6 months Douglas enlisted into the Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF) on the 27th February 1916. He was described as being 5-ft 10½-inches in height, weighed 170lbs, with a chest measurement of 34-inches minimum, 38-inches maximum, he had no distinguishing marks and his physical condition was 'good'. Douglas gave his occupation as a chartered accountant, religion Presbyterian, was willing to be vaccinated and gave his mother as next-of-kin. He had had previous military experience with the 2nd Queen's Own Rifles of Canada and with a militia unit, the 9th Mississauga Horse and agreed to serve for the duration of the war.

Medically examined by Captain E. Howard at the Toronto Recruiting Depot, Douglas was passed fit for overseas service with the C.E.F., on the 28th February 1916 and posted as a Lieutenant to the 170th Battalion. The 170th Battalion, Mississauga Horse was an infantry unit in the Canadian Expeditionary Force during the First World War. Based in Toronto, the unit began recruiting during the winter of 1915-1916 in that city. Many recruits came from the 9th Mississauga Horse, militia regiment. The battalion sailed to the United Kingdom in the autumn of 1916 and in December it was absorbed into the 169th Battalion. The regiment today is perpetuated by the Royal Regiment of Canada.

On the 25th October, 1916 Lieutenant Douglas Wright embarked at Halifax on the S.S. Lapland and disembarked at Liverpool on the 31st. Before leaving Canada Douglas made an allotment of \$30 to be paid to his mother through the Bank of Toronto and had deposited his Last Will & Testament with a solicitor in Toronto. After undergoing further training for deployment to the Western Front he was transferred to the 18th Battalion (Western Ontario) Regiment, an infantry battalion. The Battalion had been instituted on the 7th November, 1914 and was recruited and mobilised in London, Ontario. They embarked for the United Kingdom on the 18th April 1915

and were sent to France in September. The battalion fought as part of the 4th Infantry Brigade, in the 2nd Canadian Division in France and Flanders until the end of the war. It was disbanded in September 1920 and is perpetuated today by The Essex and Kent Scottish Regiment, a Primary Reserve infantry regiment of the Canadian forces.

Lieutenant Douglas Wright joined the 18th Battalion, in France at the beginning of January 1917. In April 1917 he was wounded during the Battle of Vimy Ridge. The battle, 9th to 12th April was part of the Battle of Arras. Four divisions of the



Tezze British Cemetery ~ Italy

Canadian Corps, 1st Army, assisted by the British 13th Brigade, 5th Division, fought against three divisions of the 6th German Army. The attack was in support of the Nivelle Offensive (16th to 9th May) – a Franco-British – operation. The French part was intended to be a strategically decisive break through of German defences in 48 hours on the Aisne front. It was a costly failure and the offensive was suspended on the 25th April.

The Canadian Corps objective was to capture the German-held high ground of Vimy Ridge, an escarpment on the northern flank of the Arras front. Vimy Ridge is an escarpment 8-kilometres north-east of Arras on the western edge of the Douai Plain. The ridge, approximately 7-kilometers in length rises to a height of 60-metres giving an unobstructed view in all directions for several miles of Douai Plain. Capturing the high ground would give protection to the First Army and the Third Army farther south from German enfilade fire.

With the strong support of a creeping barrage, the Canadian Corps captured most of the ridge during the first day of the attack. The village of Thélus was secured during the second day, and also the crest of the ridge, once the Canadian Corps had overrun a salient against stubborn German resistance. The final objective, a fortified knoll situated outside the village of Givenchy-en-Gohelle, fell to the Canadians on the 12th April and the German 6th Army withdrew to the Oppy-Méricourt line. The success of the Canadian Corps was attributed to their technical and tactical innovation, careful planning, concentrated artillery support and intensive training and to

deficiencies in the German 6th Army's defensive plan. It was the first occasion that the four Canadian divisions fought together and became a symbol of Canadian achievement and sacrifice. A 250 acre area of the former battlefield is now a memorial park and location of the Canadian National Vimy Memorial.

Douglas Wright was admitted to the 4th Canadian Field Ambulance on the 28th April and the following day to No.16 Casualty Clearing Station at Bruay. From there, on the 30th April he was transferred to No.14 General Hospital at Wimereux where he was diagnosed with Trench Fever. On the 7th May he was evacuated to the United Kingdom on the hospital ship St Andrew, and taken to the Cambridge Research Hospital.

During his initial period of hospitalisation Douglas was taken off the strength of the 18th Battalion and moved to the General List. Later, on the 28th May he was transferred and nominally posted to the Western Ontario Regiment Depot.

Trench fever is a moderately serious disease transmitted by body lice. It infected during the First World War the armies in Flanders, France, Poland, Galicia, Italy, Salonika, Macedonia, Mesopotamia, Russia and Egypt. The disease is caused by the bacteria found in the stomach walls of the body louse.

Transmission can be caused by

contamination of a skin abrasion or louse-bite

wound with the infected faeces of a body louse. Classified generally as a five-day fever of the relapsing type, it rarely exhibits a continuous course. There is approximately a two week incubation period, followed by the onset of symptoms of high fever, severe headaches, pain on moving the eyeballs, soreness of the leg muscles and back and frequently hyperaesthesia – sensitivity – of the shins. Initially the fever is usually followed after a few days by a single, short re-occurrence but there may be many relapses between periods without fever. Pain in the legs is often the most constant symptom and recovery from trench fever takes four-to-six weeks.

On the 13th May, Lieutenant Wright appeared before a Medical Board held at 13 Berners Street, London. Instructions for such an attendance were as follows:-



Grave of Lieutenant D.C. Wright RFC

1. On the occasion of an Officer's first appearance before a Medical Board for his present disability, the circumstances under which the disability was contracted will be fully detailed; whenever possible a statement of the case by his medical attendant will also be attached.
2. In recording the proceedings of subsequent Boards, the progress of the individual since his last appearance will be clearly and concisely stated so as to ensure a continuous medical history of the case being available.
3. Enteric Fever, Dysentery, Malaria, etc., contracted when on service abroad, in countries where there is a special liability to the disease, are to be regarded as caused by military service.

After his medical examination the Medical Board found that '... this officer reports from hospital. He is acute pale in appearance and states he feels very weak. Has slight pain in back in nature of cramp. He complained to his M.O. on 24th April 1917 of fever and chills.'

The Board declared that Lieutenant Wright was 'NOT FIT' for General Service, Home Service or Light Duty at Home for a period of three weeks and noted that disability was contracted in service. He again appeared before a Medical Board at Berners Street on the 6th June. Examined by the medical board they found that 'This officer has recovered from the disability – [trench fever]. He at times had pains in the back. The Board recommended as stated.' 'NOT FIT' for General Service for one month but 'FIT' for Home Service.

During his period of hospitalisation and recuperation Lieutenant Wright possibly gave some thought about his prospects in the army. Once he was completely fit he was aware that he would be returned to his former infantry battalion or to another for service on the Western Front. There is no indication on his service record when he decided to apply for a transfer to the Royal Flying Corps. Perhaps he considered air combat to be marginally more preferable than trench warfare.

His application for a transfer to the Royal Flying Corps was approved for him to become a Flying Officer from the 17th September 1917, which was subsequently announced in the London Gazette of the 8th October. It is not recorded on his service record about the training he underwent to become a Flying Officer. His monthly pay was \$108 plus an additional \$11 flying pay. However, on the 8th November 1917 he was officially seconded from the CEF for duty with the Royal Flying Corps and posted to 28 Squadron. The squadron had been formed at Gosport, initially as a training squadron and later became a fighter squadron equipped with Sopwith Camels in VII Brigade, Royal Flying Corps.

The VII Brigade, Royal Flying Corps was formed at Loughton, Essex in October 1917, for service in Italy with 14th and 51st Wings and Nos. 9 and 20 Balloon Companies. After crossing over to France it left there in elements, between the 16th and 26th November. The first element arrived in Italy on the 18th November and the last on the 1st December. The various elements began forming up at Mantova – (Mantua) – on the 18th November, moving to Legano two days later and then to Altichiero on the 1st December. They were temporarily disbanded in March 1918 and reformed in April with 64th and 65th Wings and later 61st Wing, operating with the Royal Navy in the Dover-Dunkirk area until disbanded in May 1918.

‘Wings’ in the Royal Flying Corps consisted of a number of squadrons. As the Royal Flying Corps expanded the ‘Corps Wings’ were grouped in pairs to form brigades under the command of a Brigadier-General

The disastrous defeat of the Italian army by the Austro-Hungarian and German forces in the Battle of Caporetto (24th October – 19th November 1917) led to the transfer of three Royal Flying Corps Sopwith Camel fighter squadrons (28, 45 and 66), two two-seater squadrons (34 and 42 with RE8’s) and No. 4 Balloon Wing to the Italian front in November 1917. 139 Squadron (Bristol Fighters) was added in July 1918. The VII Brigade Royal Flying Corps consisted of 14th and 51st Wings, comprising 28, 34, 42, 45 and 66 Squadrons, 7th Aircraft Park, Aircraft Supply Depot, 2, 22, 24 and 33 Kite Balloon Wings and 20th Balloon Company.



Grave Of Lieutenant D.C. Wright RFC

Operations began against Austrian and German air and ground forces in December. Reconnaissance missions, both visual and photographic were undertaken, observation of railway networks used by enemy forces and strategic bombing raids on enemy targets were also carried out. The enemy was not passive or inactive and bombed Allied targets including air fields and workshops in December. The Royal Flying Corps reciprocated and gradually gained air superiority over the enemy. The Sopwith Camels were used not only as fighters but also as

bombers. Their experienced pilots outclassed the enemy and carried out a bombing offensive against enemy aerodromes. In February 1918 the airfield at Carasa was bombed by 28 and 66 Squadron with considerable success and initiated a number of similar operations.

On the 20th February, 1918 Lieutenant Douglas Wright flying B5193, a Sopwith Camel of 28 Squadron, was shot down over Conegliano and reported as missing in action. The report of his death was communicated through Austrian sources to the Geneva Red Cross Society. This information was subsequently forwarded to VII Brigade Headquarters.

Trevor Henshaw in his book 'The Sky Their Battlefield' records that after being shot down he was taken as a prisoner of war and conveyed to Vienna where he died of his wounds on the 22nd February, 1918, aged 22 years. His body must then have been returned from Vienna by the Austrians to the Italian front as he was originally buried at Vazzola, not far from Conegliano where he was shot down. It is feasible that Lieutenant Wright was taken to Vienna. Presumably the wounded Canadian pilot was recovered from the crash site and had his wounds treated initially at an enemy medical facility and then transported to a hospital in Vienna. Or due to his wounds it would seem more probable that he was treated locally by the Austrians, hence his burial at Vazzola.

Although the Red Cross had informed VII Brigade headquarters about the circumstances of his death there is no further information on his service record as to what had happened to him during the forty-eight hours after being shot down on the 20th February.

Lieutenant Douglas Wright RFC was later buried in Tezze British Cemetery, Italy, Grave Location: Plot 5, Row C, Grave Number 8. Tezze is a village in the Province of Treviso, a large town to the north of Venice. It is approximately 20-kilometres from Conegliano and 10-kilometres from Vazzola. Tezze British Cemetery contains 356 burials of the First World War. Lieutenant Douglas Wright is the only Canadian buried there.

His name is commemorated on Page 526 in the Book of Remembrance of the First World War in the Memorial Chamber of the Peace Tower in the Canadian Parliament Buildings in Ottawa. There are seven Books of Remembrance commemorating more than 118,000 Canadian service personnel who have died in the service of Canada. An eighth Book of Remembrance commemorates 1,600 personnel who served in the Canadian fencible or militia units and died in the War of 1812. Lieutenant Douglas Wright's name is also inscribed on the Wright's family gravestone.

Toronto Evening Telegram ~ March 5th 1918

Lieut. D.C. Wright

Lieut. D.C. Wright who has been serving with the RFC in Italy is reported missing. Word to that effect has been received by his mother at 98 Highland Avenue. When the war broke out, Lieut. Wright was one of the first to respond to the call. He went overseas in the Spring of 1915 with an armoured motor transport column. He later transferred to the infantry in which he served as lieutenant in the 170th Battalion. He took part in the fight at Vimy Ridge, where he sustained a wound. Last summer he was invalided for several months as a result of trench fever. In December he went to Italy and has been serving there till the present date. He has a brother overseas. Lieut. Wright was educated at St Andrew's College.

Toronto Evening Telegram ~ April 18th 1918

Lieut. Wright Dead – Fell into Hands Of Austrians While Flying In Italy

Lieut. D.C. Wright, of 98 Highland Avenue, Rosedale, is reported dead according to official Austrian reports. In February he was reported missing, his machine having disappeared over Austrian lines while he was serving with a fighter squadron in Italy in the RFC. Lieut. Wright enlisted in 1915. He was first with an armoured motor transport column, but transferred to the Infantry and fought at Vimy Ridge with the 170th Battalion. He was wounded and was on convalescent leave last summer but in December re-joined the forces in Italy. He was educated at St Andrew's College and is a son of Mrs J.D. Wright.

In February 1920 Douglas's mother received her son's 1914-15 Star, British War Medal 1914-1920, Allied Victory Medal 1914-1919, Bronze Memorial Plaque and Memorial Scroll, and the Canadian Memorial Cross.

The descendants of Lieutenant Douglas Christie Wright were one of many who made a donation through 'Give a Vimy for Vimy' initiative in support of the 2017 Centennial Commemorations.

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