

Edward “Ted” Staves: Chestermere Ditchrider (1919-1933)

Ted Staves was born on 10 January 1878¹ in Thorpe-le-Vale, Lincolnshire, England² and grew up in the town of Market Rasen where his father worked as a maltster.³ At age 14, Ted was employed as an errand boy for a local baker⁴ and by 1901 had moved to Accrington, Lancashire where he worked as a railway engine cleaner.⁵ In February 1904,⁶ Ted married Margaret Ellen Boothman who was born in Church, Lancashire on 25 May 1873⁷. Like her father and sisters, she worked as a cotton weaver from a early age.⁸ By 1911, Ted and Margaret had two children, daughter May and son Joseph Edmund, both born in Church, and Ted was employed as a stoker in a print works.⁹ Leaving his family in England, Ted departed Liverpool aboard the Canadian Pacific ship *Empress of Britain*, landing at the port of Halifax on 14 March 1914.¹⁰ He travelled across Canada by rail to Strathmore where he found work with the CPR as the telephone lineman in charge of the Western Section.¹¹

On 14 October 1915, nineteen months after setting foot on Canadian soil, Ted enlisted at Calgary as a private in the 82nd Battalion, Canadian Expeditionary Force. His attestation paper described him as standing five feet, eight and a half inches tall, with black hair, blue eyes and a fair complexion. It was also noted that he had previously served three years with the Lincoln Volunteers. Ted left Halifax on 20 May 1916, again aboard the *Empress of Britain* which had been converted to a troop ship and arrived at Liverpool on the 29th. In mid-July he was transferred to the 9th Reserve Battalion and then to the 50th Battalion (Infantry) on 20 August, arriving in France the next day. Early in 1917, Ted was trained as a non-commissioned officer and received promotion to the rank of Corporal on 11 March.¹²

The 50th took part in the now-immortalized Battle of Vimy Ridge from April 9 - 12 and suffered heavy casualties. (<https://www.warmuseum.ca/the-battle-of-vimy-ridge/>) Ted was amongst the wounded, having received a gunshot wound to the face on 12 April which severely fractured his lower jaw.¹³ The Battalion's War Diary recorded that, “During the day and throughout night of 12th/13th enemy snipers and artillery were very active.”¹⁴ Ted was evacuated to a field hospital before being sent to England for surgery. He was promoted to Sergeant on 10 May and was subsequently awarded the Military Medal for bravery in the field.¹⁵ (<https://www.veterans.gc.ca/eng/remembrance/medals-decorations/details/53>)

The medal citation reads, “In the attack on The Pimple, Vimy Ridge, April 12, 1917. He showed great bravery and devotion to duty during the attack. Although he was seriously wounded in the face during the advance he persisted to the final objective and would have remained there had he not been ordered back. His report to Headquarters on the way to the dressing station was clear and accurate and of great value in reinforcing the line. No doubt his action was partially responsible for successfully repelling the counterattack which developed soon afterwards on this part of the line.”¹⁶

Following a second operation in October 1917 and the fitting of dentures, Ted was declared medically unfit for duty and invalided back to Canada aboard the hospital ship *Araguaya*, arriving at Halifax on 16 February 1918. He was finally discharged from the service on 26 June at Calgary.¹⁷

Likely in late 1918, Ted secured employment with the CPR as the Chestermere ditchrider and his family joined him in early January 1919.¹⁸ The original Chestermere Headquarters property had recently been purchased by the previous ditchrider, Fred Woods, so the Staves family moved into a newly constructed company house located further south. The October 1918 Superintendent's monthly report described the property as follows: “The new house and barn at Chestermere Headquarters were finished on the 26th of the month except for placing rollers and track on the barn door and some window stop for the house, the material for which had not been supplied. This house and barn looks well and it is thought will be a

most comfortable and desirable headquarters as has yet been built.”¹⁹ Near neighbour Kate MacKenzie recalled, “The CPR built a new house nearer to the headgates for Mr. Staves who took over. He was a returned man. He did a hard work breaking the land around the new house almost by hand and planted trees. This was to be a demonstration of what irrigation could do.”²⁰ In 2002, Kate’s granddaughter Kay Clarke wrote, “For many years the grounds were beautiful with flowering trees of all kinds, some of which are still growing in spite of many years of neglect.”²¹

Ted served as Chestermere ditchrider until his tragic death at age 55 in 1933. On the morning of 9 August, he borrowed his son’s rifle, presumably to shoot a muskrat that was causing damage to the canal bank. When he failed to return to make his morning report to the Dalroy Watermaster, his son went to find him and discovered his father near the fence about 200 yards from the house with a gunshot wound to the head. He died in hospital in Calgary that afternoon. The subsequent Coroner’s jury found that the fatal injury had likely occurred when the gun’s trigger caught on the barbed wire and discharged as Ted crawled through the fence.²² His funeral was held on 12 August and he was buried in the Field of Honour at Burnsland Cemetery.²³

Following Ted’s death, his wife and daughter moved to Calgary where Margaret died in September 1944. Daughter May trained as a teacher, married James Peebles in 1935 and had one daughter. She died in Calgary in 1971. Son Joseph E. worked for the CPR telephone system at Strathmore and later for Alberta Government Telephones. He married Grace Grover in 1930, had a son and two daughters and died in Edmonton in 1970.²⁴

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¹ Edward Staves Attestation Paper, 1915. Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9248-22, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=248587>

² 1881 Census of England, Lincolnshire, Market Rasen, Joseph Staves household; digital image Ancestry.ca, (<http://www.ancestry.ca>); citing The National Archives of the UK (TNA), Kew, Surrey, England; *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1881*; RG11, Piece 3281, Folio 49, Page 7.

³ Ibid.

⁴ 1891 Census of England, Lincolnshire, Market Rasen, Joseph Staves household; digital image Ancestry.ca, (<http://www.ancestry.ca>); citing The National Archives of the UK (TNA), Kew, Surrey, England; *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891*; RG12, Piece 2623, Folio 49, Page 25.

⁵ 1901 Census of England, Lancashire, Accrington St. Peter, John Dixon household; digital image Ancestry.ca, (<http://www.ancestry.ca>); citing The National Archives of the UK (TNA), Kew, Surrey, England; *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1901*; RG13, Piece 3859, Folio 43, Page 8.

⁶ Edward Staves Service File, Regimental number 160640. Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9248-22, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. [https://www.bac-lac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=248587](https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=248587)

⁷ "England Births and Christenings, 1538-1975", database, FamilySearch (<https://familysearch.org/ark:/61903/1:1:NKJ9-957>: 19 March 2020), Margaret Ellen Boothman, 1873.

⁸ 1891 Census of England, Lancashire, Oswaldtwistle, Church, John Boothman household; digital image Ancestry.ca, (<http://www.ancestry.ca>); citing The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1891*; RG12, Piece 3411, Folio 133, Page 40.

⁹ 1901 Census of England, Lancashire, Oswaldtwistle, Church, Edward Staves household; digital image Ancestry.ca, (<http://www.ancestry.ca>); citing The National Archives of the UK (TNA); Kew, Surrey, England; *Census Returns of England and Wales, 1911*; RG14, Piece 25137.

¹⁰ Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. Passenger Lists, 1865–1935, RG 76, Roll T-4752. Ancestry.com. *Canadian Passenger Lists, 1865-1935* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2010.

¹¹ "Local Jottings," *Strathmore and Bow Valley Standard*, October 27, 1915, 1.

<http://peel.library.ualberta.ca/newspapers/SMS/1915/10/27/1/>

¹² Edward Staves Service File, Regimental number 160640. Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9248-22, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=248587>

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ War Diaries of the 50th Canadian Infantry Battalion, 1916/08/10-1917/12/31. RG9-III-D-3, Volume/box number 4941, File number 441, Ministry of the Overseas Military Forces of Canada fonds, Canadian War Office Records.

<https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/collectionsearch/Pages/collectionsearch.aspx?q=9-52%20war%20diaries%2050th%20Battalion&>

¹⁵ Edward Staves Service File, Regimental number 160640. Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9248-22, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=248587>

¹⁶ E. Staves Military Medal Citation Card, 1917. Honours and Awards Citation Cards, 1900-1969 (Accession 2004-01505-5, volume 63. Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. Ancestry.com. Canada, *Military Honours and Awards Citation Cards, 1900-1961* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2012.

¹⁷ Edward Staves Service File, Regimental number 160640. Canadian Expeditionary Force (CEF), RG 150, Accession 1992-93/166, Box 9248-22, Library and Archives Canada, Ottawa, Ontario. <https://www.bac-lac.gc.ca/eng/discover/military-heritage/first-world-war/personnel-records/Pages/item.aspx?IdNumber=248587>

¹⁸ May (Staves) Peebles, "The Staves Family," in *Saddles, Sleighs and Sadirons*, Chestermere Historical Society, 1971, 414.

¹⁹ Robert S. Stockton, October 1918 Monthly Report, 4 November 1918, Western Irrigation District fonds, Series 6 - Project Manager's monthly reports, M-2273-161, Glenbow Archives, Archives and Special Collections, University of Calgary, Calgary, Alberta.

²⁰ Kay Clarke, email communication, April 4, 2020.

²¹ Ibid.

²² "Staves Fatality Found Accidental," *Calgary Daily Herald*, August 12, 1933, 3.

<https://www.newspapers.com/image/479781314>

²³ Sgt. Edward Staves (1878-1933), Find a Grave Memorial 135987294, added September 16, 2014.

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/135987294>

²⁴ May (Staves) Peebles, "The Staves Family," in *Saddles, Sleighs and Sadirons*, Chestermere Historical Society, 1971, 415.

DITCHMAN FINDS BODY OF W. A. STEVENS FLOATING IN LAKE AFTER SEVEN MONTHS

Evidence Clear That Missing Calgary Grain Buyer Was Accidentally Drowned in Chestermere Lake at Time Of His Disappearance on October 10, Last Year—The Body, Fairly Well Preserved, Floats Near Where Car Was Discovered on Bank.

The body of W. A. Stevens, missing grain buyer, of Calgary, was found in Chestermere lake on Wednesday morning. Teddy Staves, ditch rider, who had been employed to watch the lake for the appearance of the body, noticed it floating on the surface about 150 yards from where the man's automobile was found on October 10, last, three days after he disappeared from his home here. Staves notified the authorities here and the body was brought to the city by the Armstrong ambulance. It has been identified as that of Mr. Stevens.

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